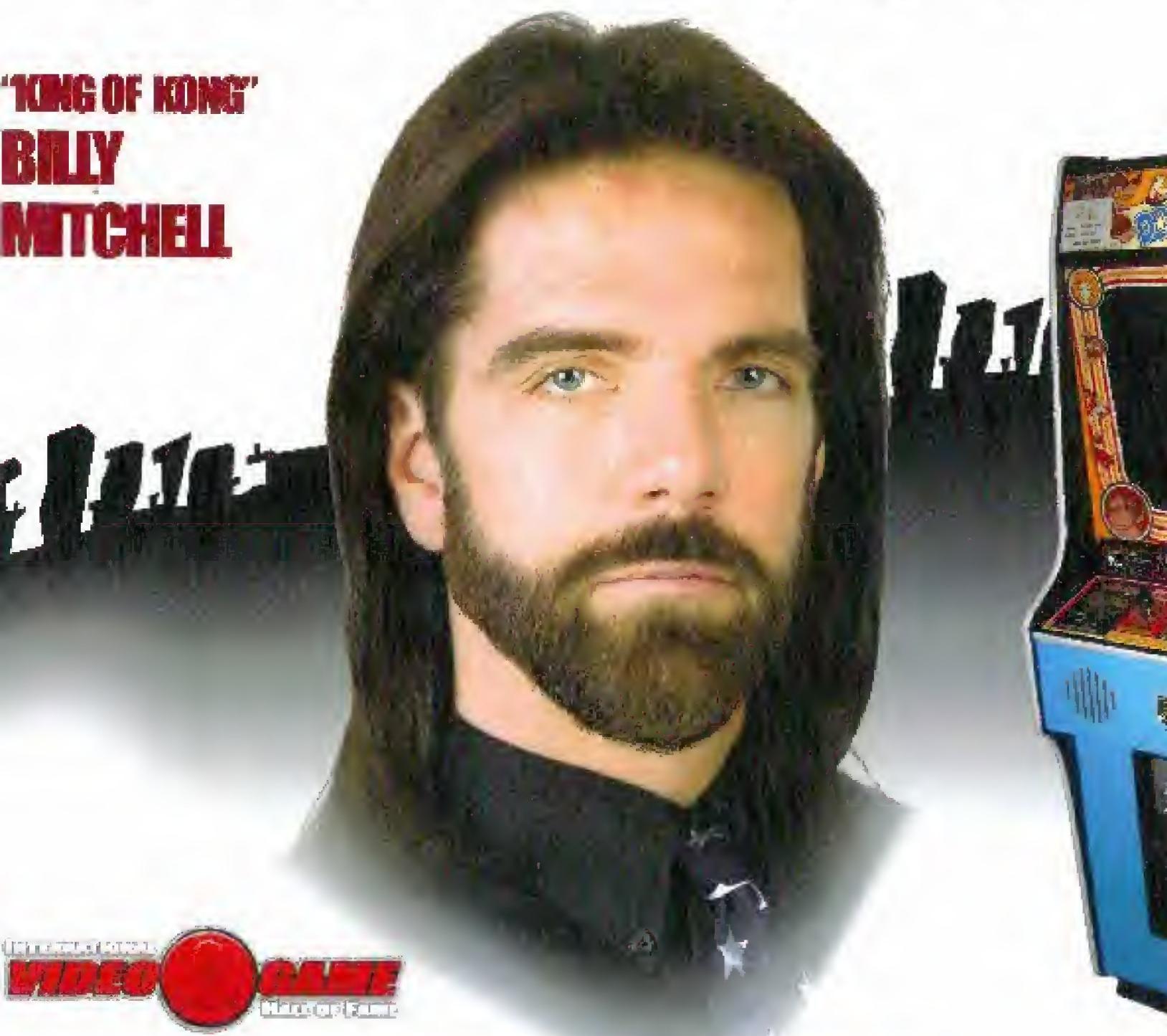


VIDEO GAME COLLECTOR

'KING OF KONG'
**BILLY
MITCHELL**



INTERNATIONAL
VIDEO GAME
Photo by Paul

BIG BANG 2010

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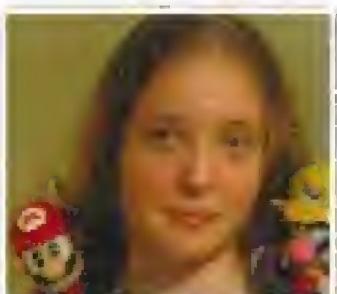
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VIDEO GAME COLLECTOR

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Collector's Spotlight



Tim & Jen Lehner

Age: Both 27

Residence: Moore, Oklahoma

Number of Systems: 24 including handhelds

Number of Games: 700+

Collection Highlights:

Customized Atari 2600 Donkey Kong proposal cart programmed by Paul Slocum
Berzerk arcade machine
Posters for Atari homebrews
184 Nintendo games
221 Atari 2600 games
Super Mario Bros. 2 curtains!



Best Find in the Wild:

Working Berzerk arcade machine purchased at a thrift store for \$25

CIB NLS Contra Force purchased at a thrift store for \$3

Complete and working Virtual Boy system

Words of Wisdom:

Check your local thrift stores and always hit the game display case first. Be sure to check the entire store for hidden caches of games or other video game memorabilia too. Also, join an online video game community, like Atari Age, for advice, tips, and trading.

Wants:

(Jennifer) Miracle Piano Teaching System for NES

(Jennifer) R.O.B. for NES

(Tim) Crazy Climber for Atari 2600

(Tim) Bounty Bob Strikes Back for Atari 5200

New World Records

DONKEY KONG
1,062,800 Points



DONKEY KONG JUNIOR
1,270,200 Points



In a press conference at the International Video Game Hall of Fame's Big Bang celebration in Ottumwa, Iowa it was announced that renowned video game player Billy Mitchell had broken back to back world records on Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong, Jr. Fans of video game s (and many non-gamers who caught the documentary King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters) know that Donkey Kong is a notoriously difficult game and the race to set and overtake records on the game provides plenty of drama. Video Game Collector magazine caught up with Billy Mitchell and his rival from King of Kong Steve Wiebe for exclusive interviews. Read on to learn more about the men behind the scores...

Billy Mitchell

INTERVIEW

The film King of Kong made you a celebrity, even though you had long-standing records and achievements. Has anyone tried to license your image or make any Billy Mitchell products?

Truthfully I get asked about that stuff all the time. People always say "You should do this or that" but it's usually not anyone that can be taken seriously. If my friend from high school says "You should make a bunch of Billy Mitchell shirts and sell them" I'm like "You go ahead and we'll split the money." All that stuff takes too much time. So no, no one has paid me to license my image, they just use it to be nasty on the internet.

How do you feel about playing in public?

I was at Classic Gaming Expo in 2004 and I played a game of Donkey Kong to the kill screen. I got 900-something thousand points and I did it in public. I'm told it would have been a record

if it had been an official game. Last week I was playing in a very public arena. I was at Boomers, a local place, and there were tons...there were scores, that's a better video game word...there were scores of people watching what I was doing.

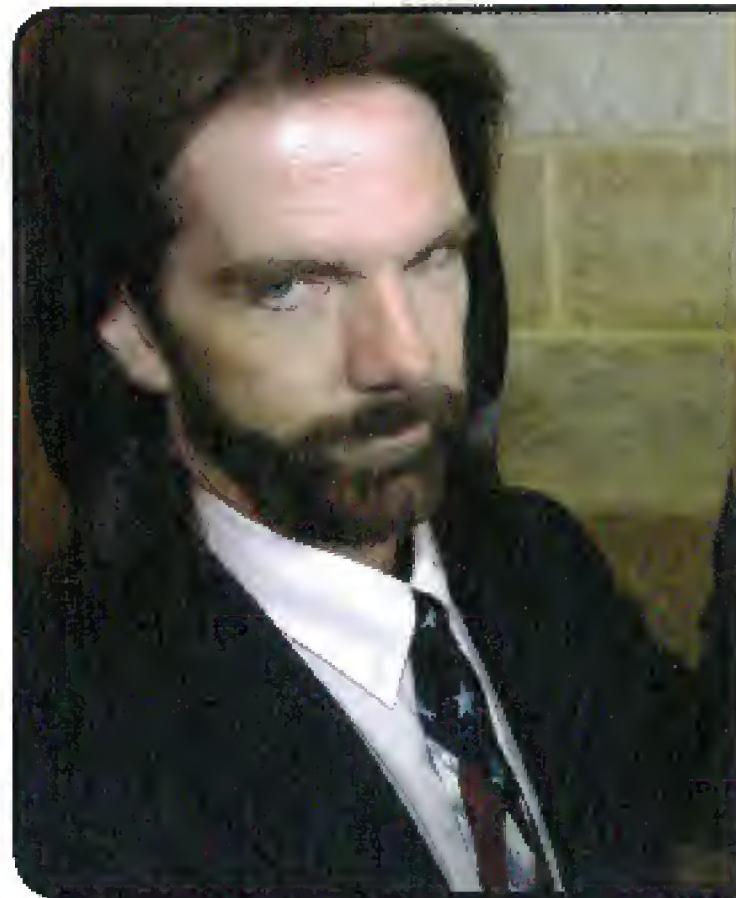
I can't talk about it but there will be a major announcement and press conference in Ottumwa. [See Twin Galaxies website for announcement -ed.]

By the way, Boomers is a great place. It used to be the major arcade, it was open 24 hours. I honestly believe that Boomers has produced more champions than anywhere else in the world. It was without question the reason many of us were so good.

Have you had many requests for other tv or movie appearances?

Last year I got a request from a Canadian production company that wanted me to do a program. I cut them off and told them that I wasn't interested before they even said what it was or what it would pay.

It was during my son's football season and we don't miss that for anything. Eventually they called back and I told them if I could wait until after the season, and if they would fly all four of us up there, then I would come do it. Well, they had to lower their offer and I had some fun with them, asking if the offer would be four times higher without the family. They pretty much said it would be much higher if I were coming alone, but to me it's worth it to go, even for little or no money, if I can have the family with me. If we are all together it's not really working, it just makes it like a vacation.



How did you get into the hot sauce business?

Well chicken wings weren't always everywhere. Hot wings started in Florida and spread across the country. At our first restaurant, which my parents bought, I decided to add hot wings to the menu. Our business literally doubled in exactly two months to the day after we added them. When I launched my hot sauce brand and was helping people expand into hot wings I used to sit in meetings with the stuffed shirts at major chains and retailers and tell them their chances of success couldn't be any greater due to



the fact that I was there with them. I'd tell them about my records as a gamer, and it was something many of them could relate to since many of them grew up in the Golden Age of video games, but I'd also tell them that my relentless pursuit of perfection came from gaming. It's etched into my personality and it's something I carry with me into everything I do.

How has fame impacted you personally?

This has given me a great opportunity. In the morning I drop my kids off at school. In the afternoon I pick them up. When all the moms are there for Thanksgiving I'm usually the only dad. This has given me a chance to spend time with my kids and family, and that's something that is very precious to me.



Billy Mitchell of Hollywood, FL is widely considered to be the best video game player of all time. Billy's accomplishments include the first ever perfect game of Pac-Man, the world record on Donkey Kong and the #3 score on Donkey Kong Jr. Billy is also a top-5 player on Burgertime, Centipede and Ms. Pac-Man. In addition, Billy was a member of the Electronic Circus and the U. S. National Video Game Team. Billy was named "The Video Game Player of the Century" at the 1999 Tokyo Game Show.

Billy and his family own the Rickey's Restaurant chain based out of Hollywood, FL. Billy created the Internationally distributed brand Rickey's World Famous Sauce.

Twin Galaxies is the world authority on player rankings, gaming statistics and championship tournaments, with pinball statistics dating from the 1930s and video game statistics from the early 1970s.

As the electronic gaming industry's premiere statistician, Twin Galaxies preserves the history of gaming in a historical database, which documents the historical milestones of the electronic gaming hobby as it evolves into a professional sport.

Founded in 1981, Twin Galaxies grew from modest origins as an arcade chain operator to gain recognition as the "official scorekeeper for the world of video game & pinball playing," invested with the authority to verify "official" world record high-scores and crown new world champions.

The Twin Galaxies scoreboard was the creation of Walter Day, Twin Galaxies founder, who, on June 6, 1981, embarked on a series of business trips that took him through 15 U.S. states in 4 months. Though his role as a traveling salesman was the focus of his trip, Day's real passion was to visit as many video game arcades as possible and record the high scores he found on each game.

Crowning the Video Game
Ottumwa
Video Game Capital

TWIN GALAXIES:

Ten thousand miles and one hundred arcades later, Day, on November 10, 1981, opened his own arcade in the sleepy Midwestern town of Ottumwa, Iowa. It was called Twin Galaxies and its tranquil existence was altered when, on February 9, 1982, Day's growing database of high score statistics were made available to the public as the Twin Galaxies National Scoreboard. As the organizational center of competitive video game playing, Twin Galaxies received immediate recognition from the major game manufacturers of the day: Atari, Midway, Williams Electronics, Universal, Stern, Nintendo and Exidy, in addition to support from RePlay Magazine and Playmeter Magazine—the two premier coin-op publications of that era.

Twin Galaxies' role as the scorekeeper grew in importance as "player-rankings" became a major focus of the media. As the pioneer in ranking the top players, Twin Galaxies was called upon to bring the superstar players together for many well-publicized



THEN AND NOW

contests and media events. For example, On November 8, 1982, LIFE Magazine visited Twin Galaxies to capture sixteen of North America's best players in a group photograph. Two months later, on January 9, 1983, ABC-TV's "That's Incredible" came to Ottumwa, Iowa, to film nineteen of the world's best players competing in the first-ever video game world championship.

As Twin Galaxies' fame spread further, Walter Day was designated an assistant editor in charge of video game scores for the 1984-1986 editions of the U.S. edition of the Guinness Book of World Records. Under Day's direction, Twin Galaxies wrote the first official rulebook for playing electronic games and established the rules and standardized settings for each game. Today, this rulebook has evolved into Twin Galaxies' most well known product: Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records (ISBN 1887472-25-8), a 984-page book containing scores from players in 31 different countries compiled since 1981. A second



edition, totaling 1500 pages in a two-volume set, updated with today's hottest PC titles as well as modern consoles like the X-Box and PS2, was released in 2008.

Today, Twin Galaxies is recognized as the world's premiere electronic games referee, having judged contests and high scores submitted by console gamers, arcades and PC gamers worldwide.

In December of 2009, Walter Day retired from Twin Galaxies in order to pursue a music career. The scorekeeping organization now functions under the name Twin Galaxies International. It operates under the guidance of new CEO Pete Bouvier who is developing the organization into a professional service provider supplying gaming statistics and adjudication services for the video game industry worldwide.

Steve Wiebe

INTERVIEW

What were you into when you were growing up?

I was really into drawing. I was always drawing as a kid. I'd make my own baseball cards, copy the designs from other cards, and make my own players. Once I made a Darth Vader mask with five rolls of electrical tape. But I also had an Atari and I'd play it every day, especially in the summer. That was the only system I bought but my friends would have other systems, so sometimes we'd play on one person's Intellivision, and then someone got a ColecoVision, so we'd kind of play at different houses.

Did you play in arcades much?

Oh yeah, we had a couple of great arcades. There was a dedicated arcade called Wizards in a strip mall, and another place called Galaxy 2. I got in trouble for that one once. I skipped out on my chores and rode my bike up there to play. I was maybe thirteen or fourteen, and it was four miles away, which was farther than the other arcade but it was an easier bike ride. My mom found out I was there, came

in and got me in front of my friends, and threw my bike in her car. But generally, my parents were very supportive of me playing video games. In fact, my dad had one of the earliest video games—one of those Sears dedicated Pong games that plug right into the tv. Arcade games were everywhere back then. They were in gas stations, pizza places. I remember Godfather's pizza had a row of four or five machines and even though there weren't as many games there as the arcades it was a lot cooler to play there because you could hang out with your friends, and eat pizza while you weren't playing!

Were you a competitive gamer back then?

I don't really remember competing against anyone, just trying to get higher score. And it didn't matter who got the highest score, we were just trying to get farther in the game and we'd kind of all cheer each other on. But I do remember taking it pretty seriously where some people would just play as a diversion. I remember looking at the early "game guides" in stores and trying to pick up on strategy.

What were your favorite games?

Well, I really liked Space Invader and Asteroids when they first came out, and then when I played Pac-Man I was just hooked and that was my favorite for awhile. I was always aware of the other games in the arcade but I stuck to a handful that I really liked. A friend of mine was really into StarGate but I found it too complicated, control wise. You had all those buttons! I liked games that were more like Jungle Hunt. I remember I was just starting to get into Popeye, and they had a Karate Champ I'd play on the ferry boat, but then I got into sports and didn't play video games so much.

How long were you out of the hobby?

Not long, actually. I got back into playing in college. I remember in 1990 my friend's fraternity brother owned his own Donkey Kong arcade machine. I ended up buying one of my own and keeping it in my room. We'd have a little club of five or six guys who would come in and play it. Every time I came back



from class there would be someone in my room playing it! I actually played it to the kill screen twice. Back then I didn't know what it was so I thought it was just a problem with my machine. I eventually sold it and then 10 years later when I started looking into scores I found out what it was.

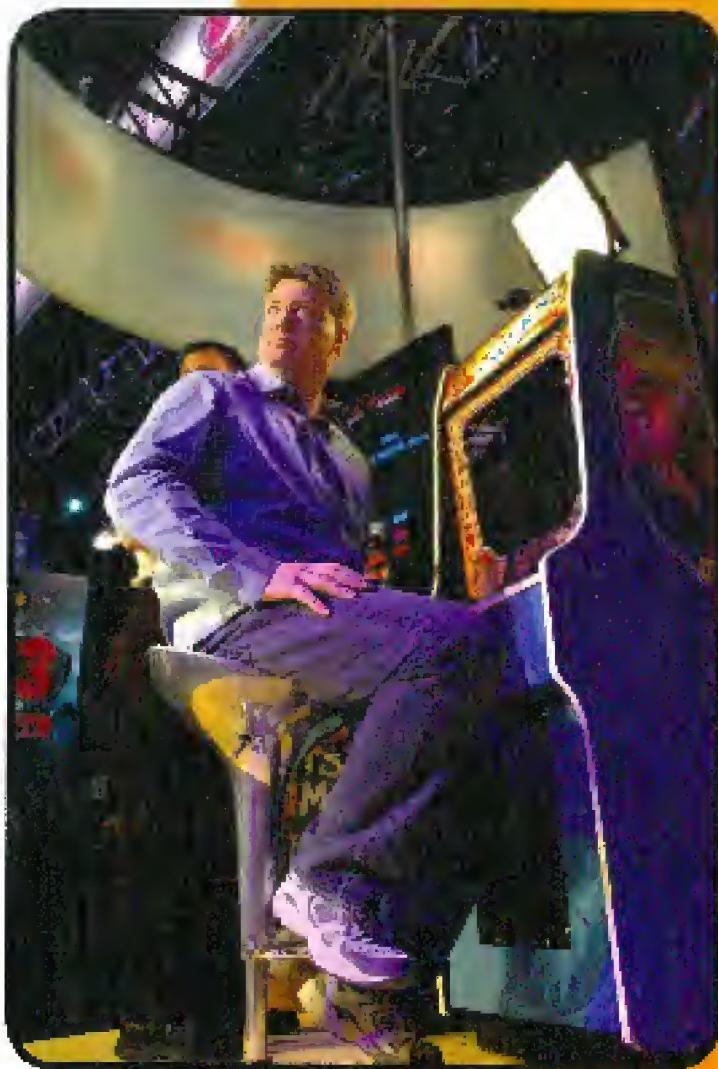
The documentary King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters focuses on your attempt to break the Donkey Kong high score. Was that your first record attempt?

No, I actually sent my Donkey Kong Jr. score to them first. I bought a Donkey Kong Jr. cabinet but I didn't realize the game had been converted from a Double Donkey Kong, which is a non-official game. My score was accepted but eventually someone noticed that my record was made playing on a Double Donkey Kong board and they pulled it down. This was the start of the problems since Twin Galaxies may have thought I was trying to get one over on them. I bought an official Donkey Kong, Jr. board but they weren't in a hurry to verify my scores.

Do you think the film is accurate in the way it portrays people? Do you think it is factually accurate?

They had to simplify the story somewhat because it would be too complete to appeal to the average viewer otherwise. An early version ran over two hours and included everything about my Donkey Kong Jr. record attempts, but it became too detailed. I have heard that Billy Mitchell doesn't feel the movie portrayed him well but the director, Seth Gordon, really has great respect for the hobby and he wasn't trying to mock anyone in the film. He did have to have some humor in the movie and it's a fine line but he really respects the hobby. Any one who is interested can read more details on the Twin Galaxies website.

The truth is no matter how you feel about the different people or how they come across in the film every person was crucial to the film. It was a great story and it really all came together beautifully.



Steve Wiebe
(pronounced "Wee-Bee")
of Redmond, WA is one
of the best Donkey Kong
and Donkey Kong, Jr.
players in the world.

Steve is a former world record holder on the title with only 1,100 points separating him from first place player Billy Mitchell. When he's not trying to save Pauline from Donkey Kong, Steve plays golf and writes and performs music.



Steve currently teaches math and robotics at Finn Hill Jr. High School in Kirkland, WA, where he also coaches softball, basketball and baseball.



STREET FIGHTER II TURBO HD REMIX

Just when you thought the string of adjectives couldn't get any longer, Captain, Backbone and Udon have teamed up to bring PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 owners Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix. However, this time the update comes at an epic scale with a mind-boggling number of tweaks and additions to create an entirely new experience for the proven arcade icon.

While the downloadable title keeps the arcade original (actually pulled from the Japanese Dreamcast's Super Street Fighter II X for online matching title) along with an option for true arcade 4:3 ratio display, the meat of the hotly-anticipated fighter lies in its incredibly detailed and reworked Remix version, which brings completely fresh graphics, audio and gameplay to the table. The massive facelift given to the characters and backgrounds comes courtesy of Udon Entertainment, which handles all of the comic book and manga series bases on the Street Fighter franchise. With so much in-game content, Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix Producer Ray Jimenez explained the list of items to reproduce is much longer than one may think.

"The list may seem pretty long but the total comes to about 3,500 in-game sprites," Jimenez said in an interview with Video Game Collector. "This includes all of the frames of animation for the characters, all of the user projectiles and Vega's claw (which actually is a sprite separate from Vega). On top of this, we have about 19 endings, 16 harkumans and

a whole new opening sequence."

The new graphics truly shine with definition and thanks to high-res 1080p images, players can be wowed all over again with Street Fighter's larger-than-life characters. The game's music also makes a jump in quality with players having the option to pause an opponent along to the original songs or switch over to quirky remixes of each theme.

The title throws a proper curtain, with all 17 of Super Street Fighter II Turbo's original members making a return from the original Shokkars Ryu and Ken all the way through the bastardly Akuma, who first debuted in the original Super Turbo game. Thanks to the online capabilities of the systems, players will be able to take their skills online when smacking around the computer or a local opponent just isn't enough. While online players can take advantage of in-game voice chatting, matchmaking options, personal and friend statistics tracking, worldwide rankings (including a deep range of stats such as number of throws, perfects, highest combos and more along with the expected win/loss tally), eight-player tournaments and a familiar quarter-maten mode, which allows two competitors and four spectators to cycle and nut - just like waiting in line to tackle the champion in a real arcade. If you're spending too much time licking wounds from online bouts, a training mode will allow players to practice and step up their game.

However, the real story behind the game's Remix features is the brutal number of hours the developers are putting behind the game's "Unbalanced" game mode.

"This was an idea from one of the designers at Backbone Entertainment," recalled Jimenez on the decision to rebalance the game. "It's a very

accomplished Super Turbo player himself and from his own experiences from the original game, wanted to create a mode with slight tweaks that he and his peers felt the game could use. We definitely could've released just the original mode but really wanted to make the most that we could of the game."

A number of fighting changes have been implemented to the mode as created and tested by a number of the world's top-ranked Street Fighter pros. In fact, so many balance changes are being made that Davis Birkin, a Street Fighter vet overseeing the production of the title, is busy claiming the restructuring makes the mode a true sequel to Super Turbo and with the restructuring, he hopes the mode will become the new standard for Street Fighter II on the professional level. While Capcom doesn't officially host Ginxel Fighter tournaments, it has become more in tune with the nation's biggest fighting game tournaments, which features a number of Capcom fighting games.



"Official tournaments are always something I would like to see," notes Jimenez. "Since Seth KI am has come on board, we've definitely had been having a more official presence in the Evolution Tournament scene (<http://www.evo2k.com>). We even host some of the semi-finals in our booth at Comic Con last year. While I don't know if we'll ever have any official 'Capcom' tournaments, we will certainly be increasing our visibility in the existing tournaments in the future."

Prior to HD Remix's release, Super Street Fighter II Turbo was the tournament standard choice among the original entries, as it was highly competitive and strategic with the addition of super moves and juggles implemented into the Street Fighter II engine. With the version being the professional norm, it's no surprise there are a legion of fans and dedicated players lined up and willing to dedicate their



தெ கார்த்

"We've been using Evolution players to test the game. Evolution is the largest fighting game tournament out there and many of the top players in it have contributed to making sure the changes are good," Jimenez said in reassuring the balance of the tweaks. "They spend time fighting and testing what could potentially be game-breaking changes to the game. They make sure that a change to a character cannot be exploited to make them unfair and overpowered. There actually isn't a whole lot of science to it but utilizing their combined decades of experience with Super Turbo, we're relying on them to make sure we don't unbalance the game and most of all, keep it fun."

With the huge tease of balance between certain characters, the goal of the team is to close the gap that separates the characters, forcing players to rely on skill instead of mismatched character selections and also opens up opportunities to encourage playing as all of the characters. Since Capcom doesn't keep tabs on tier data, there is no official ranking of characters, however, using the opinions of well-known professional players, HD Remix is being rebalanced via a "makeshift tier" that melds the thoughts of numerous people.

"There's no real 'official' tier designation from Capcom I'm aware of," said Jimenez. "The tiers that Seth has alluded to on the Capcom site vary slightly from person to person. Seth is also a tournament Super Turbo player and the tier he sees him in more



or less a consensus of various opinions of other players. They pretty much analyze the strengths and weaknesses of all the characters, determine how each character plays against another, which character wins in certain situations and probably a whole other list of factors I don't know about. Using this data, they've pretty much come up with a general tier layout of who are the best and worst characters in the game."

The original Akuma was only selectable via a code in Super Turbo, but serving as an expert alternate boss character, Akuma is severely weaker and features a ludicrous amount of power that sees him banned from any official tournament (he is obviously unbalanced in the "Resurgence" mode). While tiers differ from player to player, the general consensus usually places Old Sagat (a version of the character as he played in Super) activates via code), Dhalsim and Balrog as the top tier while dumping T. Hawk, Cammy, Blanka and Fei Long as automatic underdogs in any Super Turbo fight. With the tweaks made to the game play, it is Capcom's hope that Fei Long will be able to go toe to toe with Balrog in a balanced match.

The road was long and difficult for Capcom, but the title finally saw the light of day on the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 during Thanksgiving week in 2008. Up until then, the only way players could get a taste of the experience was through online Ryu and Ken-only Xbox 360 beta included with the purchase of *Wolf of the Battlefield: Commando 3*, yet another example of Capcom's commitment to updating its classic franchises. Evo2K has long listed the title on its front page, anticipating its eventual rise to Street Fighter II competitive supremacy when it finally joins the fighting game lineup this July. However, gamers everywhere now finally have the first brand new Street Fighter II experience in almost 15 years and Jimenez thanks each and every fan for their patience while the game was in development.

- Aaron Austin

OVERCLOCKED REMIX

Health care system leaders recognize that shared decision making can improve patient satisfaction and reduce health care costs.

David W. Lloyd (selected 1). Perhaps building on previous belief, which I might go on calling Plainly, I have not fully identified myself with my colleagues. I have not written any blind wine-tasting reports with publisher Ray, or indeed with Captain myself. I have not done anything I agree with in \$12,000-a-chapter in the history of gaming, and this section appears to be the exception.

Larry O'Connell: By the way after hearing it from Devil's Brew, I thought it was by "Finally," CC Rich was an extremely talented and they've been working with her for years, so I've been waiting to see specifically what she has for a wife. Right in the mind, I think we're talking about a big deal.

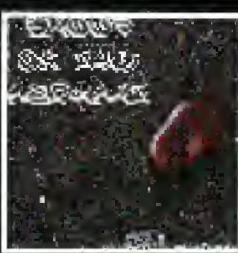
Through the course of creating blood on the asphalt ([#2202](#)) and water ([#2203](#)) or the arrangements for the game, was there any one favorite character theme ([#2204](#)) the artist fought long in order to be the creator of it?

opener); believe it or not, we checked drama ames at *Body Double*, *Aye Lucious* (aka, *AE*), did have an off-the-shelf of "E. Honda Soap," which was the soap. I was planning on making Ray was I'll (feeling that initial system), so there's some soap, and my version wasn't right either. Rather than chasing it back, I abandoned and continued on with the new form instead that was more appropriate. So, we didn't make any mistakes, more than one initial assumption, their own concept of a good show, but we lost the *Casper* look, which, see, they preferred the older, with it. I think everyone was surprised to be a part of the panel the audience appreciated his input whenever he was more of an issue. If we were to something similar again (hopefully), we might have to worry about this a lot more.

From the original score, what would you say your favorite and least favorite songs are from Star Wars: Episode III?

Okay, I'm gonna say it right now this is what a cop out, Adam, but I've got 17 checkboxes. They've all got ticks and they're all extremely memorable, so they've been chosen. I have a site since the 90s, I guess some of the existing themes will have to be the "weak link". You were forced to give something that's not bulletproof at the start of the year already. The new themes are what game is like now, and I think... um... weak links are there.

objectives. Let's consider the high-stakes PISA measure: literacy. A reading test such as PISA's can become something much more interesting if it is used to highlight the relationship between students' reading achievement and their personal and social well-being.



Learn Git: [git for me!](#)

When you throw in the menu and presentation media, exactly how many tracks has OCR produced for the game and much time has been put into the project overall?

Day 01 Parallel mode: for 30 seconds of music from three years ago 20 Radios, one at a time, play the above themes, last minute of three themes (or an audio file) in long loop, ending theme and other radiostations. Once finished the project is complete. Duration: 20 x 4 minutes = 80 minutes above Pi in Fantasy cell. Note when 20% of the 100th song (007 number song), which is how I remember the timeline as well. 204 songs for a bit going out during my lifetime.

Continued on page 33



'KING' OF FAST FOOD VIDEOGAMES

By Gary Molohan

Many video-game journalists chuckled when they heard Blitz Games, creator of Xbox launch title Fuzion Frenzy, were developing a trio of 'advergames' for Burger King. Well, they weren't laughing when the titles – Big Bumpin', Sneak King, and PocketBike Racer – sold more than two million copies in just four weeks, ranking them amongst the most popular games of the 2006 holiday season. In keeping with this issue's food theme, VGC recently spoke with Chris Swan, director of Blitz Arcade, to learn what working for the King was like.

How did Blitz Games Studios come to be involved in the creation of the Burger King games? (In other words, who approached whom?)

Blitz already had a strong relationship with Microsoft from the creation of the Fuzion Frenzy game, a launch title on Xbox. We were also talking to them about the idea of doing an advergame – at the time we had no idea that BK were talking to them about the exact same thing! We were therefore a natural choice for the games.

What attracted you to the project(s)?

As mentioned above we were already interested in doing something brand-related, as we're always keen to look at alternate business models for games. The fact that it was cross-platform also appeals to us, as it's one of the key strengths of our internal middleware. Then there was the challenge of creating the three games themselves on two formats (Xbox and Xbox 360) in short timeframe – we're suckers for challenges like that.

How did you select the three unique genres to be used?

Well, for two of the games (Pocketbike and Big Bumpin') we wanted to choose a game style which would deliver a 'slice of quality' while also having mass appeal, so we proposed a racing game and an arena game. BK then chose the themes for these games that were appropriate to their characters – pocketbikes and bumper cars. Sneak King was different as BK wanted one of the titles to reflect the US ad spots, which see the King sneak up on unsuspecting people and surprise them with a burger – so the initial concept was built-in for that game.

How were the platforms (Xbox and Xbox 360) chosen? Were there any technical difficulties putting both versions on a single disc?

Microsoft was a key player in this relationship, and the games wouldn't have happened without them. At the time of release the 360 was still a fairly new console, so BK wanted the Xbox one to be supported as well in order to reach as

many consumers as possible. It took a bit of initial head-scratching between us and Microsoft to find a way of dual-booting the discs, but they soon had it sorted.

Did you seriously consider any other genres? If so, what were they?

Back at the very early concept phase we considered quite a few genres, such as a rock band management game, a demolition derby game, and even (very) crazy golf! There was also a game concept called Big Head, but even we can't remember what that one was about now!

How long were the games in development? Were they developed concurrently? Were the staff sizes and development times comparable to other games on which you've worked?

The games were developed concurrently in a total period of seven months, and yes, the team sizes were comparable to the majority of retail titles.





Were you able re-use any assets (game "engines," character models, sounds, etc.) from game to game?

The BK characters themselves were shared across all three games. This was a conscious decision from the outset, as it meant that we only needed to obtain one set of approvals for them. Having worked with a lot of license holders, we're very aware that approvals of precious assets can naturally take time, so we wanted to keep this as streamlined as possible in order to hit the end date.

Which game, in your opinion, turned out the best? Which one was the weakest?

To be honest we're very happy to see that nearly every review rates a different game as the best, i.e. there was no obvious best game as it simply came down to personal preference. My personal favorite is probably Big Bumpin' due to the hockey games, but I can have a lot of fun with all three of them.

Were you surprised by how well the games sold? Can you report any sales figures? Were the games a good value, in your opinion?

The last reported sales figures were 3.2 million copies sold across Northern America. We knew that these kinds of numbers were being pressed, but we're still surprised at how quickly the games were bought by consumers across America.

What was it like working with the Burger King executives? Were they heavily involved in creative decisions or did they give you free reign? Did

they request any changes? If so, what were they? Were there ever any serious disagreements?

Like any client who's close to their brand, the BK team were heavily involved in most aspects of the games' development. Right at the start of the project, though, we had a kick-off meeting where it was agreed that Blitz was the gaming expert and BK was the brand expert. We therefore led the design and dev process, checking with BK for approvals, while they led the theming and brand issues.

Is Burger King popular in the UK? Are consumers there familiar with "The King" character? Game developer David Perry recently told us that Ronald McDonald is called Ronald "Fright Wig" McDonald by some in the UK. Is The King the target of such abuse?

Although BK is popular, I don't think the "King" adverts have received the same level of appeal as they have in the US. He almost comes across as a celebrity over there!

Why is Brooke Burke in the pocket bikes game? Do people in the UK know who she is?

Brooke Burke is involved as she has been part of the King story. There's been a lot of press about whether the two of them are in a relationship or not - who's to say for sure?

Was there any concern that working on "advergames" like the BK titles would damage the company's reputation? Were you afraid you'd

look like sell-outs?

Not hugely. We were certainly aware that advergames had a bad reputation generally across the community, but that's because most of them simply take a very generic game and cover it in logos. We were creating different advergames that were each based in the brand's universe as opposed to being simply labelled by the brand, so we were pretty confident that they would be well received. Some of the initial response from the press when the games were announced was a bit disappointing, but we were ready to prove them wrong.

Has the company asked for sequels? Are you interested in doing more?

No comment...

What is the super-secret title on which you're currently working? Would you give our readers a tiny hint? Puh-lease??

It's an all-out MMO set in dimension where time no longer exists, and all characters are driven by thought alone. Only joking - no comment.



BROTHER, CAN YOU

By Gary Molkhan

This spring, "Game Room" on Xbox LIVE lets you relive the glory days of classic arcade games in their original forms.

If you were a child of the '80s, you undoubtedly shared a common dream with about two-thirds of your friends: skinny-dipping with Heather Locklear. There was, however, an equally fantastic and compelling dream shared by youths of the era: owning your own video arcade.

Three decades ago, video arcades were not the sunny,

family-friendly oases filled with linked racing cabinets, motion-enabled games/thrill rides and generous ticket-redemption titles — they were dark, smoke-filled "man caves" located on the wrong end of town and populated by dodgy-looking dropouts with bad teen mustaches. Still, we loved them like a troubled-but-dreamy teen who just moved into town and is looking for someone who understands them (sigh).

Game Room Features

While Microsoft Game Studios can't arrange a pool party with

Ms. Locklear, they can help you with the whole video arcade thing. Beginning this spring, "Game Room" on Xbox Live and Games for Windows will allow gamers to create their own old-school video arcade, populate it with classic game cabinets, trick it out with colorful themes and animated gaming icons, and challenge friends — or, more accurately, their avatars — to beat your high scores and earn all-new achievements and special medals..

At launch, Game Room will feature a library of 30 original

At launch, Game Room will feature a library of 30 original arcade and console classics such as Centipede and Asteroids Deluxe from Atari.



SPARE A QUARTER?

arcade and console classics such as Centipede and Asteroids Deluxe from Atari Inc. and other favorites from Activision Inc., Intellivision, Konami Corp., all shown in their original cabinets. Then Xbox will release new game titles weekly, all of which players can demo free of charge and purchase individually for 400 Microsoft Points. You also have the option to pay to play a single game -- just like dropping two quarters in the slot in the old arcades -- for 40 Microsoft Points! Better yet, your Avatar can stroll over to a friend's arcade and preview games there for free!

Additional Specs

Game Room offers HDTV 1080p video support and in-game Dolby Digital sound for one to two players. The application also promises to deliver a rich social experience by including Avatar support, voice chat, and cross-platform leader boards and Achievements.

So start re-growing your mullet and dig up your checkerboard Vans and parachute pants -- all eyes will be on you as you stroll into Game Room for the very first time.



Game Room will be one piece in the biggest year in Xbox history. 2010 also includes the 10th anniversary of the Xbox console, the next installment of Halo, and a number of improvements on Xbox LIVE.



Made in Japan



Feeling the Beat Through Japanese Imports

Compiled by Aaron Auzina of VGC and Eddie Lchecka and Keith Glater of Rhythmistyle.com

One of the facts U.S. rhythm game fans have to face is they are pretty much finished for anything new. While piccolo guitars and cranes have taken the country by storm and filled living rooms over the past few years, and the occasional maraca, turntable or dance pad has miraculously slipped through, Japan at around the turn of the century threw around rhythm-based titles like the U.S. purrs out first person shooters. Fast forward to 2008 and while the production of music-based titles is nowhere near what it was during the boom, the supply is still healthy as select Bemani still releases on an annual schedule and these crazy things Japan has called "americas" carry lineups of machines waiting for players to get their groove on. Import gamers that have been into the scene for quite some time have no doubt laid down a pretty penny bringing over software and crazy peripherals to the United States but players new to the genre can be quite intimidated by the more than 700 recorded rhythm game titles produced worldwide for every system created since 1997.

Obviously, the best place to start is in the fan-favorite Bemani line of titles produced continually by Konami of Japan. Among the games still ticking include the insanely popular Beatmania IIDX and Pop'n Music titles along with the mega popular Guitar-Freaks & Drummania franchise that served as the inspiration to a few of the U.S.'s best selling current titles. Of course, Dance Dance Revolution still has a following in the country (see pages 25-26), but in Japan, DDR doesn't even hold a candle to IIDX and Pop'n in the current market.

Straight from arcades, players can enjoy every single release from Arc Style up to '14 Core on the Playstation 2, complete with a humongous controller made for the home system. In IIDX, players attempt to create electronic music through the use of seven keys resembling piano keys along with a spinning disc to simulate scratching a record. The titles are extremely challenging, especially in the later installments, but arguably contain the best presentation of all Bemani titles with stylish characters and themes and well-produced videos specific to each song. Most Beatmania IIDX titles will run players \$100-120 a pop and the official controller will cost you another \$70 – thankfully the latest U.S. Beatmania's upgraded controller is of higher quality and can be picked up brand new with the U.S. version of the game for \$20-30 if you can still find it at retail. If you absolutely must have a perfect arcade controller though, online retailers will be happy to oblige in exchange for more than \$400.

On the other side of the coin, Pop'n Music doesn't simulate any sort of instrument or musical style and the results create what are hands-down the most diverse song lists you will ever find in any music game period. Players are able to select trademark animated avatars and move away on a controller of the myriad buttons of varying colors to create music. Pop'n

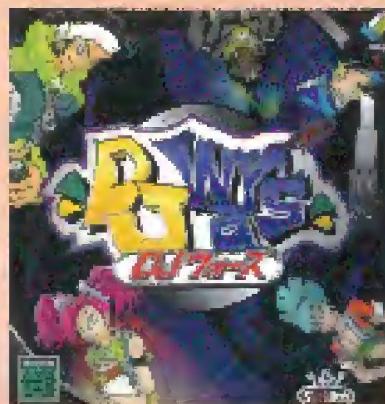
Music also currently runs through 14 (FCVER), but, unlike IIDX, this series has seen its share of systems, with its beginnings and expansions being released on both the Playstation (One) and Sega Dreamcast, along with specialized controllers for each system, before finding a permanent home on the Playstation 2 starting with Pop'n Music Best Hits and Pop'n Music 7. While "best hits" versions of a handful of the games mercifully dock the price of admission down to \$30, newer versions will still run players around \$70. Unfortunately for players coming into Pop'n Music now, many retailers are out of stock on the specialized controllers, but you can still look out every now and then on eBay.

Among the other console unicities you'll find from Konami include one original five-key version of Beatmania for various Playstation (One) systems, a handful of Cellar Freaks games for the Playstation along with Guitar-Freaks & Drummania titles for the Playstation 2, KeyboardMania complete with USB keyboard for the Playstation 2, PSP versions of the piano keys hand drumming game Piano Panic Paradise will flex sensors and foot sensors can be put to even more use with matching gloves in the Tekken-like Martial Rush for the Playstation. Much like the CDR for Game Boy detailed in our cover feature, players can even find games such as Pop'n Music on the Game Boy and in your Instinct, you can own Headbands for the WonderSwan. A number of these titles are also available in very collectable LCD keychains for quick burst of rhythm on the go.

The Dreamcast in Japan is perhaps the only system that can rival the Playstation in terms of attempting to bring music-infused gaming home. While the U.S. very graciously received a few releases such as Samba de Amigo and Space Channel 5, players did miss out on a few more titles other than the already mentioned IIDX and Pop'n Music titles. The Dreamcast and the Neo-Geo Pocket both received SHK's Melodies Cool Cool Toon title, which requires players to mix up analog stick and face button actions in rhythm to songs in order to keep the music and anime-inspired dances moving. While Cool Cool Toon never reached our shores, thankfully, many of the system's other music-themed titles hit the U.S. on alternate systems – titles such as Space Channel 5 Part 2 and Rec and the Wii version of Samba de Amigo file in the songs we never received from the Japan-only Samba de Amigo ver. 2000.

While Nintendo is aiming to release most of its music based titles state-side, fans of the genre can't go wrong with still importing the titles. The GameCube in Japan saw three installments of Donkey Konga and every single one features a completely different song set than the U.S. songs' two games. Fans of Japanese music will enjoy stepping our songs like the lovable themes, J-pop, J-rock, swing from famous Japanese commercials classics - amcom and Nancos themes and more in each version. Turnendo confirmed at E3 Rhythm Heaven would finally release in the United States, coming over as a port of Japan's Rhythm Tengoku Gold for the DS. Rhythm Tengoku, also available on Japanese Game Boy Advance and arcade formats plays similar to the Wario Ware mini-game setup, but all of the included games are rhythm based. And, finally, while Nintendo of America first teased a DS rhythm game "Jam With the Band" on the back of Nintendo DS boxes released at launch, Japan has since enjoyed multiple versions of Daigassai Band Brothers. Band Brothers allows players to sing, use the face buttons and d-pad to play instruments or the touch screen to play guitar and arrange piano sheet music, all complete with Wi-Fi downloads and wireless multiplayer.

We are featuring a review of the U.S. Bust A Groove 2 in this very issue (page 34), but there are a few intrepid fans of the series can pick up if they invest in Japanese versions of the series. In Japan, where the bubble busting Bust-A-Move is known as Puzzle Bobble, the country knows the series as Bust A Move.



and features a Playstation 2 version, *Bonza Rhythm 2001*, that was never released in the U.S. The Playstation 2 title really picks up the pace of game play, thrusting up to four characters into the fray and creating random strings of commands that all four players have to follow. With the new format a number of brand new bonuses and team maneuvers become possible and Eric still kept the wacky characters and catchy songs intact. Going back to the series' roots, however, players can pick up a Premium disc version of *Bust A Move*, with a bonus CD-ROM featuring a video of *Hatsumi Morinaga*, singer of the Japanese version of *Kitty Ni's* stage theme and Japanese dancers costumed as various in-game characters as well as videos promoting other Japanese Eric game releases. In my Japanese release of *BAM* or *BAM2*, there are subtle differences in the characters and songs that were censored and removed in the U.S. versions and the Japanese version of *BAM2* actually has ending videos done completely in English that were missing from the U.S. version. How does that make sense?

You may have noticed that not only are music games being prominently featured in this issue, but we've also compiled a number of one on one 2D fighter battles. What's extremely interesting is Japan has a few games, which actually meld the two concepts together.

Step Happy Rhythm Busker for the Playstation is almost a completely unique title in the world of rhythm gaming, because the core gameplay is actually more of a *Street Fighter II* clone. The rhythm element comes into play when you perform a character's special attacks. Depending on the level of your power gauge, you can look into another character to perform moves, in which a series of four markers appear on the screen for a pseudo-DDR style mini-game. Higher power gauge levels equate to harder combinations of "notes" and more damage to your opponent. The mini-game also affects the music in the background at the time. THQ had an American version in development and showcased it at an early E3, but eventually canned it. A prototype was sold on eBay a few years ago for just more than \$50. The Japanese edition is a rarity in itself, mostly likely due to the fact that even past the gimmicky nature of the game, it's actually extremely solid in its game play.

Dragblade for the Nintendo DS is more of a beat 'em up affair but it enters into one on-one territory as the different characters battle in the sport of "grappling" of stadium across the world. The game play is quite simplistic in nature, but by building up energy, players can activate a line of "notes" that execute combo attacks when the attack button is pressed in the correct timing. Players can purchase a number of pre-arranged combos in the game, but *Dragblade* allows players to change the pitches of the notes and create their own maneuvers. Attaq has since released *Dragblade* in the United States, but Japan has recently received a sequel that is still up in the air for a U.S. release after an unsuccessful launch of the original title.

Another fantastic example of how great of a format the Playstation is for music gaming is in *Vib Ribbon*, a very simplistic music-beat game where players can actually place their own Music CDs into the system and play custom-filled courses created through analyzing the tracks' audio spectrum. Players assume the role of what looks like a stick-figure robot as it automatically moves forward through stages after a music track is selected. Noting places in the music track where there are certain attacks and sound spikes, the game generates obstacles such as spike pits, ladders, sheaves and walls, prompting players to hit a specific button to clear the trap and stay out of danger. The game should really appeal to rhythm buffs due to the vector-like graphics akin to the block Becketop and while lines of games such as *Asteroids* and as players progress through the stages, the screen vibrates in time to the current music. Anyone with a large CD collection is sure to get a ton of game play out of *Vib Ribbon*.

Along the lines of *Vib Ribbon*, another Playstation title which will put game play from your personal music CDs is *Goo! Goo! Goo!*. The title is a DDR clone which automatically generates game play steps that can be played on controllers or dance pads. In a bit of a twist, the player's dancing character also serves as a virtual pet that evolves and learns new dance moves through game play.

Thankfully, not everything is all about the Playstation, as other systems do

have some great importable music titles. The Sega Saturn has a DJ simulator entitled *DJ Wars*, but it is highly unlike games such as IIDX. In the game, the player isn't forced to comply with any commands and is free to utilize two turntables however they wish, but the game keeps tabs on how players transition the records with the goal of making a smooth, nonstop mix. If you are looking for a game similar to IIDX, however, *DJ Max Portable* published out of Korea, will get your PSP speakers thumping. The game is point-and-click identical to IIDX and while the controls take some getting used to, the two versions of the series currently available are among the best examples of portable music gaming you can find today. The PSP also hosted two arcade perfect versions of the long running Pump 'n Up dance simulation series and while players can't exactly dance on top of their PSPs, both *Pump It Up Zero* and *KIX* are represented in their only formal outside of arcades. The Sony portable also received a very nice portable version of the popular MMD music game *The Audition*. Dubbed *Audition Portable*, the title does feature some wireless features and a number of great Korean songs.

Players can join in with other import gamers and order a copy of *Osu! Taiko no Tatsujin*, one of the Nintendo DS's most imported games alongside the *Jump Super Stars* series. Nintendo of America attempted to bring the charm of the series to the U.S. in a completely dumbed-down *Fito Biter Agents* (with hideously results), but nothing tops the original players will find in *Osu!* and its sequel. Instead of featuring Men in Black wannabes, *Osu!* follows groups of cheer squads which motivate people in need. Whether someone needs to make good enough grades to get into college or someone needs to sell slices on a distant planet, players pound out rhythms on the touch screen in a fashion exactly like *Fito Biter Agents*. Both titles in the series feature covers of many popular songs in Japan such as Orange Range and L'Arc En Ciel and each tune rings out of the DS with great quality.

Finally, one series we just can't forget to mention did get five minutes of attention back in the U.S. in 2004, but the domesticated version flopped where a couple of dozen Japanese versions have enjoyed mild success — *Taiko no Tatsujin*. The title of "drum master" suitably explains the title, which now has gone of "retailments" on the Playstation 2, Nintendo DS and Sony PSP along with various arcade versions. Developed by Namco, the game screen largely resembles *Donkey Konga*, but commands prompt players to strike the top and sides of a drum controller. The game proves rather difficult in its later stages as different commands have players drum rolling and taking double strikes with drumsticks to mix up the game play. With the success of the series, a huge number of notable Japanese hits and classic Namco tunes have been featured in *Taiko*, which is still running very strong in Japan.

Of course, there's even more obscure titles to what music gamers' appetites, but these key releases are great starts for players just getting into the import scene or wanting to expand their collections. Thankfully, while it's had its ups and downs, rhythm gaming is still running strong thanks to renewed interest on the part of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* and original titles are still streaming into homes and arcades. With the future of music gaming looking bright, we may even be revisiting the theme in a future issue! Until then, keep those toes tapping and enjoy everything music gaming has to offer.



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Violent Fighting to Come Again! As 15 years flew-by from the excitement, we now declare a round-up of the special team tournament... In Video Game Collector!

When SNK released Fatal Fury in arcades worldwide, the industry assumed that it was entering the fighting game biz with the same dubious intentions as many other small-time developers – to snatch a piece of Street Fighter II's pie. While they proved they were in it for more than cashing in on the current craze with innovations such as Fatal Fury's dual planes, Art of Fighting's gargantuan thugs and Samurai Shodown's weapon-based combat, it wasn't until The King of Fighters that Capcom faced what it feared yet desperately needed – true competition. As SNK's magnum opus, The King of Fighters is a result of a grand pooling o' resources, staff and history, gathering characters from '80s classics like Warlords and Psycho Soldier to the new martial arts masters of Southtown. Clearly SNK had vision, as the inclusion of the year in the title demonstrates that much more was to come and it certainly did as The King of Fighters has grown to become the longest running 2D fighting franchise still in existence, even surviving the bankruptcy and near obliteration of its developer.

As the star of SNK's cherry red cabinet housing their MVS, or "Multi Video System," board, an arcade owner would be a fool to not fill a slot with the latest and greatest KOF, and home players gladly paid through the teeth for the Neo Geo AES versions. Those on a budget can settle for a multitude of conversions available on PlayStation, Dreamcast, PlayStation 2 and Xbox, which often include rearranged music and 3D backgrounds among other bonus features, but purists stand by the playability of the Saturn imports. With the MVS put to pasture, SNK Playmore jumped on board of Sammy's Alumiswave arcade system briefly before abandoning ship to Taito's Type X2 board as soon as their contract was fulfilled. Now on more powerful and upgradeable hardware, SNK is poised to finally ditch the sprites that they have been recycling ad nauseam for over a decade in favor of brand new, high res, hand-drawn sprites. It's perfect timing for a new beginning, as fate placed SNK on the same hardware as that of Capcom with its 3D Street Fighter revival, and now, on the cusp of this rebirth, let us look back on all that has come before and envision all that is still yet to be.



In the Arcade

The King of Fighters '94 – The King of Fighters' humble beginnings were anything but in 1994 when minds were blown by the three-person team combat, the large crossover line-up that mixed the best of SNK and the almost exclusively animated backgrounds. The main hero of the franchise, Kyo, was introduced, as well as one of the genre's most awesomely absurd final bosses next to Geese Howard, Rugal Bernstein, who was less interested in conquering the world and more in acquiring some swanky art for his bachelor pad – in the form of your teammates dipped in molten metal.

The King of Fighters '95 – SNK addressed a seemingly no-brainer in their first follow-up: What if you don't want to use every member of a team? The King of Fighters '95 introduced "Team Edit," which allowed players to mix and match characters to their heart's desire. Beyond that, '95 is an all-around improvement on the original formula, including slightly better A.I. This also marks the introduction of Iori, Kyo's arrival, and in turn the beginning of the Orochi saga, starting the King of Fighters trend of presenting stories in trilogies.

The King of Fighters '96 – The true turning point of the series, The King of Fighters received an overhaul from the ground up, with all new sprites so smooth that SNK continued to use them well past Y2K. Flashy supers, the introduction of the roll technique and balanced A.I., that made single-player mode just as enjoyable as versus. To this day, The King of Fighters '96 has a "modern" feel, thanks to the polished refinements in both gameplay and presentation.



The King of Fighters '97 – The King of Fighters '97 is most often remembered for its unusual presentation. For once the series truly conveys the sense of being a broadcasted worldwide Olympics-style competition rather than a glorified street fight, with decked out arenas, attendees abuzz, cameras rolling and card girls announcing each round. Music is almost nonexistent with atmospheric sound effects in its place. The King of Fighters '97 is known as one of the most story-heavy entries in the series but attention was paid to gameplay as well with the introduction of two different modes. The roll was now paired with stocked supers in "Advanced" mode, but those who prefer the classic style can choose "Extra" to dodge and charge up supers.

The King of Fighters '98 – The King of Fighters '98 is most often remembered for its unusual presentation. For once the series truly conveys the sense of being a broadcasted worldwide Olympics-style competition rather than a glorified street fight, with decked out arenas, attendees abuzz, cameras rolling and card girls announcing each round. Music is almost nonexistent with atmospheric sound effects in its place. The King of Fighters '97 is known as one of the most story-heavy entries in the series but attention was paid to gameplay as well with the introduction of two different modes. The roll was now paired with stocked supers in "Advanced" mode, but those who prefer the classic style can choose "Extra" to dodge and charge up supers.



The King of Fighters '98 – With the Orochi story line done and over with, SNK had the perfect opportunity to say "To heck with plot!" and create what is known as a "dream match." With no story relevance, The King of Fighters '98, considered the most solid game of the series, gathers nearly every character the franchise has ever seen, whether they are alive or dead. To avoid becoming too emotionless, however, The King of Fighters '98 brought back the winning quotes cast off in the previous entry and elevated the fine art of SNK-grish by incorporating the choicest "misses" imaginable like "dweebenheimer." Those long lamenting SNK boss syndrome caught a break with the inclusion of the "continue service," offering a means to temporarily lower the difficulty.



The King of Fighters '99 – The imaginary slugfest was fun, but it was time to get back to business. The King of Fighters '99

laid down the beginnings of the NESTS trilogy and brought in the first new hero to steal Kyo's spotlight

K' (pronounced "K dash"). For this fresh start, SNK saw fit to toy with even the most sacred of King of Fighters staples, and they were met with resounding success. The outdated "Extra" mode was nixed, portraits were drawn in a cleaner, anime-inspired style, battle ability rankings score a player's skill and stages experience gorgonous transitions of weather or other effects. Most significantly of all, however, is that teams now consist of four members. While battles are still 3-on-3, the fourth member acts as a "striker," a fighter who can be brought into the thick of it at any time to offer assistance.



The King of Fighters 2000 – To naysayers, The King of Fighters 2000 is the last "real" KOF. Shortly after its creation, SNK collapsed, unable to bear the weight of financial strain or the abuse and neglect dealt by the hands of pachinko manufacturer Aruze, which had acquired the company prior. While SNK's founder established Playmore and eventually regained all of SNK's intellectual properties and attempted to woo much of the original staff back, The King of Fighters is a divided series, just as time is defined as B.C. or A.D. The King of Fighters 2000 reveals the beginning of this cataclysmic event, as the atmosphere is unusually dark and industrial, and it's evidently a bit rushed, a sign of money woes. Perhaps sensing the oncoming downfall, the developers honored SNK's legacy with "alternate strikers." For

every playable character in the game, there is a second character available only as a striker, and these are pulled from the entire gamut of the SNK catalog.

The King of Fighters 2001 –

While SNK's properties were openly available to the highest bidder, Korean developer Eolith nabbed The King of Fighters license and, predictably, created the weakest link in the main series. Clearly they were well behind the ears in terms of 2D fighters, and the shoddy presentation is the most blatant of issues. With wretched music, washed out, pixelated backgrounds and hideous portraits that make the fighters look deranged, The King of Fighters 2001 is a far cry from the high production values of the past and the gameplay mechanics are hurling as well. No one can say Eolith didn't try, though, as they introduced the ability to set up zero to three of the four teammates as strikers, adjusting the strength of the playable fighter's accordingly.



The King of Fighters 2002 – For Eolith's second stab at the series, they attempted to rectify their mistakes by harkening back to the glory days of KOF. Using The King of Fighters '99, the fan favorite, as a model, Eolith created another straight-to-the-point dream match – no fluff, no gimmicks. Strikers went bye-bye, as did the awkward party formation options of 2001. In fact, it could be said that Eolith played it too safe with The King of Fighters 2002, reusing anything they could get away with, but sticking to what worked resulted in a significant improvement, despite some niggling flaws still present.

The King of Fighters 2003 – In 2003, Playmore recovered the rights to the SNK name, and with SNK's intellectual properties back in their hands and many former employees rehired, SNK Playmore crafted their first King of Fighters since 2000. Since Eolith had wrapped up the NESTS plot, SNK Playmore started anew with a story that ties back into the original Orochi saga. A new hero team was introduced, with Ash Crimson, a freckle-faced, ambiguous male who looks like Puffy Duke gone horribly wrong, at its helm. Speaking of leaders, one now must be selected by the player, and he or she chosen receives an extra over-the-top super. The largest gameplay change, however, is that battles are now played out in a tag-team format, with no rounds and fighters hopping in and out willy-nilly. For long-time SNK followers, the release of The King of Fighters 2003 was bittersweet, as it was the last KOF to ever appear on SNK's own MVS board.

continued on pg 33





Forgotten Neo Geo

There's more to Neo Geo than The King of Fighters and Samurai Shodown. Even the most fanatical of SNK collectors can find themselves in a rut, chasing after the big franchises like Fatal Fury and Art of Fighting, and perhaps that's due to the prohibitively expensive prices that necessitate known quality over experimentation. However, the origins of these games, SNK's "Multi Video System" arcade board, encourages variety by definition; it's right there in the title – multiple video games. A dream come true to arcade owners, MVS games didn't require the purchase of thousand dollar dedicated cabinets that eat up floor space and offer one measly game forevermore. Instead, the hardware is not unlike a console, so, for a comparatively mere few hundred dollars, a new game can be added to a preexisting machine and effortlessly swapped in and out for an ever-changing lineup. There was never any question of compatibility, and this hardware was viable for over ten years. Even better yet, the arcade board was manufactured in four main variations, so the penny-pinching owner could purchase a one-slot or two-slot board. The four-slot MVS was the most common, however, and some even opted for the six-slot behemoth.

So say you're the proud owner of a brand new four-slot cabinet – now what? Sure, you'll want the reliable quarter-muncher, and you'd fill a couple more slots providing a little something for all tastes, such as Metal Slug, Bust-a-Move or maybe even some rockin' Neo Turf Masters. But what about those jaded Neo Geo diehards that have seen it all? You better have something that isn't in every arcade in the city and this is where the Neo Geo truly shines. Since Neo



Geo and fighters are synonymous, it's no surprise that most of the obscure releases belong to the genre and due to this saturation, far too many have slipped through the cracks of time. There's no better time than now to discover the diamonds in the rough, but beware of those dog turds hiding in the grass.

The driving force behind many small-fry developers was to take advantage of Street Fighter II's winning formula. Rip-offs were a dime a dozen in the early '90s and the Neo Geo was no stranger to this phenomenon. One of the most painfully blatant was Breakers, as it doesn't take a rocket scientist to pinpoint the Street Fighter II origins of each character. It even received a Street Fighter style revision titled Breakers Revenge but the update proved unnecessary as it's nearly identical, except with ugly palette swapping, downgraded portraits and one piddly new character. At the very least, Breakers is a solid game with attractive graphics, tight gameplay and easy comboing, which is more than can be said for Fight Fever. If you've ever played one of those disastrous homebrews that attempt to code Tekken for NES, you'll know to expect, as Fight Fever feels like a bad Chinese pirate. With hideous graphics and thoroughly awful hit detection and controls, this Korean knock-off may be official but is certainly not "legit."

At the height of Street Fighter II cloning, Data East got the worst of it as Capcom filed a lawsuit over the suspiciously similar Fighter's History. While the case was ultimately thrown out, the damage was done and Capcom's point was made – they'll go after an imitator SO HARD that the next Street Fighter II wannabe is gonna feel it. As a result, the sequel Fighter's History Dynamite is known as Karnov's Revenge in the West to disassociate itself from its sordid past. Beyond its history, the series has little to take note of besides ridiculous war cries like "Double German!", comical background details and the fact that Karnov is in desperate need of a maniere to contain his magnificent melons.

The most successful copycat of this era was the World Heroes franchise. While it began with slow, no-frills gameplay typical of 1992, each subsequent year saw substantial improvements. World Heroes set itself apart from the crowd with wacky characters like the Hulk Hogan look-a-like Muscle Power, who's so patriotic that even his crotch is cradled by the American flag, and Russian sorcerer Rasputin, who's definitely in touch with his feminine side. Another amusing gimmick is the death match,

taking place in cages rigged with gnarly spikes or electrified ropes. World Heroes 2 furthered the insanity with a nearly doubled roster and tweaked death matches, taking inspiration from arm wrestling with a single bar that fluctuates depending on who has the upper hand. As the title implies, World Heroes 2 Jet lit a fire under the game's behind and with the new speed, characters, moves and tournament mode, Jet received a tornado of hype from magazines. The fourth and final game, World Heroes Perfect, lives up to its title, as it's the most perfected the series was to become. With two-punches-two-kicks controls and super bars, Perfect adopted the standardized style of Neo Geo fighters and the energetic music and vivid historical backgrounds made for the greatest aesthetics of the franchise.

Other than World Heroes, SNK's second party ADK created the perpetually confused Aggressors of Dark Kombat, which can't decide if it wants to be a fighter or a beat-'em-up. With free movement and a jump button, you may think you're playing Final Fight, but the 1-on-1 combat begs to differ. The game was certainly inventive, but it falls a bit flat due to its unresponsive, clunky feel. ADK's Ninja Master's fared much better and deserves to be recognized as one of the Neo Geo's lost treasures. Coming off as a grittier, more realistic Samurai Shodown in appearance, Ninja Master's features outstanding watercolor portraits and large landscapes as delicately designed as bonsai trees but it's got brains to match its beauty. The customizable weapon combat gives you the choice of pulling out or sheathing your tool of destruction at whim and with finely tuned balance, you can succeed with any method you desire. Some lament the dial-a-combo system but minor grievances aside, Ninja Master's is a master'ful game.

Ninja Master's wasn't the only Neo Geo game to take inspiration from Samurai Shodown, but Far East of Eden: Kabuki Klash has even more behind its origin. Most Americans would scratch their heads in response to learning that it's the sole Tengai Makyou game to reach Western shores, but Japanese players must've been overjoyed to see all their favorite characters gathered to duke it out. Tengai Makyou was the PC Engine's answer to Dragon Quest, and its popularity can be attributed to the fully voiced animated cinematics in the first console RPG on CD-ROM, way back in 1989. Kabuki Klash does an excellent job capturing the silly atmosphere of the role-playing series, including the colorful visuals and outrageous characters and, expectably, the game focuses on weapon slashes.



and two modes of play – Power and Speed. Since it came out only one year later, *The Last Blade 2* is not a huge leap over the original but with new moves, characters and effects, it equally deserves your time.

Also building off of past ideas, SNK created *Savage Reign*, which takes dual planes much farther than *Fatal Fury*. Characters perform massive flying leaps from the ground to a higher level and in some stages, the fighters even dangle from rigging, knocking hanging fixtures onto an unsuspecting foe. All the while, characters can chuck their weapons every which way, even toward the alternate plane. Throw in an excellent sense of humor and unusual cast members, like policeman Gordon, whose chest hair is so thick it replaces the need for a shirt, and you have an original game that's worth a lark. Its vastly different sequel *Kizuna Encounter: Super Tag Battle*, on the other hand, is known for being the most expensive officially released game in the world – the European AES version, that is. With less than ten existing copies confirmed, sales have exceeded \$12,000. Unfortunately, little attention is drawn to the fact that it's one of the earliest examples of tag-team fighting and since switching can only occur in a specific zone and battles end when either character is defeated, strategic character placement is required.

Some developers prefer to take an established idea in a completely different direction, as is the case with *Double Dragon*, which isn't a beat-em-up as one would assume. This fighter captures the spirit of rampant destruction of its forefathers, with crazy entrances that almost always result in something blowing up real good and the stages are further torn asunder as the battle rages on. While they failed to acquire the rights for an official follow-up, Evoga produced a pseudo-sequel titled *Rage of the Dragons*. Featuring mostly original characters and tag-teams, similarities are minimal and the strong juxtaposition between quality and lack thereof makes *Rage of the Dragons* feel like a fan tribute. The zero-effort, digitized backgrounds with sloppily designed bystanders are only beat out in awfulness by the choppy animation, terrible hit detection and even worse A.I. of the fighting system itself. Luckily, *Matrimelee*, an entry in the *Power Instinct* franchise that includes *Rage of the Dragons* characters, isn't nearly as bad. The *Power Instinct* series is famous for its zany humor and off-the-wall combatants and *Matrimelee* stands out as one of the strangest, with vocal performances occurring in nearly every stage accompanied by weird, distract-

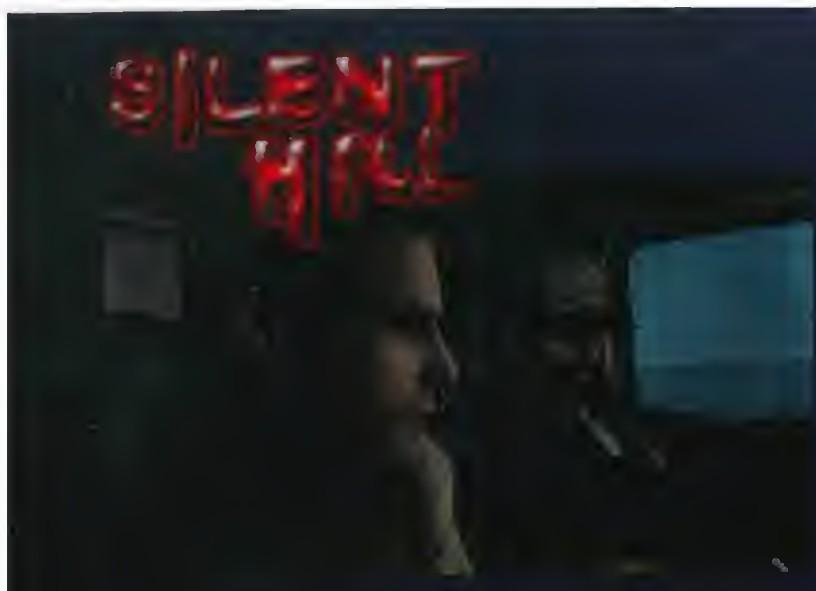
ing overhead videos. Final boss Sissy takes the prize in both cheapness and quirkiness, as she'll spam her cheesy moves endlessly with wedding music blaring.

Sunsoft laid the groundwork for fighters that laugh in the face of the status quo with its bizarre contributions. Their first attempt, *Galaxy Fight*, is an odd sci-fi themed game, in which each character inhabits a different planet, ranging from the lizardman Gunter to the robotic Musafar. Obviously, *Galaxy Fight* is loaded with comedic value but it fails at creating a cohesive theme by taking itself too seriously. Its nature also belies its difficulty but it's worth persevering to appreciate the presentation, including nice parallax in the looping backgrounds and screen-consuming portraits. The follow-up *Waku Waku 7*, however, is genuinely wacky, with a plot and cast that parodies every anime cliché in the book. With totally silly characters and vibrant graphics, even the most jaded of gamers can't resist grinning and the zippy, chaotic fighting system will keep you coming back, if only to see a giant purple bunny-monster punched across the entire length of the stage.

For some games, anime is serious business and *Voltage Fighter Gowcaizer* demonstrates that well. Designed by Masami Obari, famous for fighter-based anime, the game has all the stereotypical elements – long-legged figures, girls in skimpy outfits and pretty boys in ridiculous mecha get-ups. The gameplay is as generic as it gets but it does offer the twist of learning an ability from a defeated foe. *Gowcaizer* looks like a masterpiece in comparison to the abysmal *Ragnagard*, though. Taking a page from *Killer Instinct*, *Ragnagard* attempts to wow arcade players with its pre-rendered models but apparently nobody at Saurus realized that the characters look like grainy, hideous messes. Worse yet, this feeble technological experiment bogs down the engine, resulting in painfully lethargic, off-kilter gameplay.

Sure, some games are best left forgotten, as those who had the unfortunate fate of playing them at release surely wished to wipe their experiences from memory but others were simply overshadowed. The quality of SNK's mainstream franchises cannot be understated but success can cause developers to play it safe. Obscure fighters are allowed the luxury of taking risks and while they may fall flat on their faces, others strike gold. Give yourself the opportunity to dabble in the unknown, and you may just find a lost gem that's every bit as dazzling as the old, dependable classics.

SILENT HILL



Ten years ago, Konami introduced gamers to a whole new world of terror. After the wake of the successful Resident Evil, Silent Hill first entered our Playstations in 1999, showing gamers that survival horror could be so much more than roaming buildings full of zombies. After six entries in the series that spanned from the Playstation up to the newest systems, a hit theatrical release, numerous side story entries and even an arcade cabinet, Konami is looking to go back to where it all started for the series' 10th anniversary.

The company is lining up a re-release of Silent Hill on the Playstation 2, Sony PSP and Nintendo Wii, bringing Harry Mason back into the nightmarish town of Silent Hill in a new entry entitled *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories*. All three versions will enjoy a huge bump in graphics, remixed game play to create a brand new experience for those familiar with the original title, a brand new soundtrack by Akira Yamaoka (who is now synonymous with the franchise) and a new psyche profile element that monitors a player's actions to adapt Harry's actions. The Wii version, however, will make full use of the Remote, allowing players to wield a torch to light environments or utilize Harry's cell phone, which acts as a secondary user interface and allows players to take photos of the environment and utilize its GPS maps. The Wii Remote also allows players to examine and manipulate certain items in real time in order to solve puzzles.

With the series on its tenth year, Tomm Huiett of Konami took some time to answer some of our questions about the classic horror franchise.

SILENT SHATTERED

VGC: Can you please introduce yourself and explain to us how you are involved with Konami?

TH: My name is Tomm Huiett, and I was the Associate Producer on *Silent Hill: Homecoming*. I've also worked on *Contra 4*, *Silent Hill Origins* and a few localization projects.

VGC: What do you feel is the aspect or aspects of the series that has made Silent Hill such a successful franchise even after almost 10 years since its original release?

TH: I think one important element is that Silent Hill thrives off mystery. The games don't ever directly answer the questions they bring up, so that leaves a lot of room for fans to interpret events and dialogue between each title. It's interesting to see which things fans all agree are canonical details, and other areas where theories vary wildly. I think the hardcore fans really feel a "part" of Silent Hill because of this fact - they're the ones who worked hard to parse every detail, and when a new game comes out, they pour over that one to revise, add, and ponder all the new mysteries.

VGC: In your opinion, what does Silent Hill offer to gamers that isn't found in other games of the horror genre?

TH: Atmosphere is the biggest thing separating Silent Hill from the rest of the pack. The imagery, graphics, and sound all work together to create a wholly unsettling state of mind that players enter into when they play. That's a really palpable feeling during the game, and it apparently resonates well with people! While a lot of other games focus on dogs jumping through windows, the horror in Silent Hill is really about the whole

experience and what could be lurking out there - not necessarily what's right up in your face. The stories of the Silent Hill games focus a lot on the main character's psyche and state of mind, which really sets it apart from other games in the genre.

VGC: A huge facet of the series is in its gripping storylines and freakish presentation. What process is entailed in creating the environments, characters and monsters that make Silent Hill stand out as some of the creepiest beings in video gaming?

TH: The most original elements of Silent Hill usually come from the fact



SILENT HILL MEMORIES

the world reflects the mindset of the protagonist. So the places you travel can't just be "scary places," but they also have a deeper element that ties into the story or what's going on. I think this ties everything together more cohesively than maybe other games can do. These themes have to reflect in every aspect of the game or the effect just won't work.

VGC: So, about those UFOs ... Is there a backstory about the running "joke ending" featured in almost all of Silent Hill games? We're shooting for the UFOs to return in Homecoming because we need another fix of Silent Hill no Uta.

TH: Aliens must enjoy survival horror too.

VGC: Through the course of the series, it seems Akira Yamaoka is now synonymous with Silent Hill (in fact, readers check out all of the official Silent Hill import soundtrack offerings offered by Konami at www.konami.com). With the sound production being such a big part of the series, does Akira Yamaoka's scores influence how the game is developed or does all the sound come after everything is set in stone?

TH: The past scores from Mr. Yamaoka have had a big part in how we perceive "Silent Hill" today. As I understand it, his approach is to look at the original vision that the game creators have set out, and use his score to illustrate that. He's very good at looking to the heart of the story and drawing out the essence of the emotion behind it.

VGC: Seeing as we're a magazine focused on collecting, we have to put this one out there - Can U.S. gamers ever expect to see a North American release of Silent Hill Complete Set (Silent Hill Collection in PAL)? We're also missing the portable Play Novel: Silent Hill and the ultra-appealing Silent Hill: The Arcade. Any chance we'll ever see a piece of that action as well?

TH: Konami is always evaluating the future of Silent Hill.

VGC: What are your thoughts on the series being rather collectable, especially the original installment? At this moment, most eBay sales for Silent Hill (1) are banking in at \$40, with some sellers asking \$80-\$100 for an original, complete, mint print.

TH: As someone who's been on board since the first game, it looks like I better check out eBay. But seriously, I'm not too surprised. We've already established that Silent Hill has dedicated fans, and any series with that dedicated a base is going to also have collectable value.



VGC: This might show that I think way too much, but I'm curious: Do the people who develop and work on the games still get scared when they play through the Silent Hill titles?

TH: Whenever I think about playing the old games I still get apprehensive about it ... so, yeah. As much as I love the Historical Society sequence in Silent Hill 2 ... do I really want to live through it again?

VGC: Finally, is there any message you would like to send out to long-time fans of the series or those who haven't played one of the titles and may be interested in doing so?

TH: One important thing about the Silent Hill games is that each one has its own individual story. Sometimes it ties into old games and sometimes it's independent - but you can always appreciate a Silent Hill game on its own merits without any prior knowledge. Silent Hill: Homecoming was the same way, so nobody needs to be afraid they'll be lost if they haven't played the entire series. There is plenty of time to be afraid once you start playing.



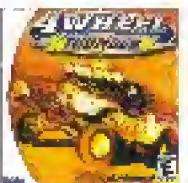
Dreamcast Photo Checklist



✓ 102 Dalmatians Puppies in the Bassus



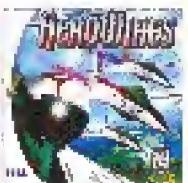
✓ 18 Wheels



✓ 4 Wheel Thrillin'



✓ 4x4 Evolution



✓ Aerofly



✓ Aeromax 2: Airline



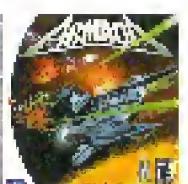
✓ Air Force Delta



✓ Alienfront: Survival Game



✓ Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare



✓ Armageddon



✓ Army Men: Sarge's Heroes



✓ Atari Anniversary Edition



✓ Bang! Gunship Strike



✓ Beyond-D



✓ Blue Stinger



✓ Commander Online



✓ Dino-Mike 4



✓ Double Dragon 3: The Return of Chen-Li



✓ Galaxy Palace 2000



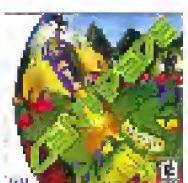
✓ Gamma Zone



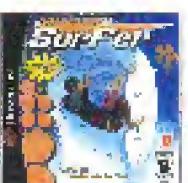
✓ Capcom vs. SNK: Shinken Fight 2000



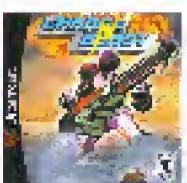
✓ Carnivore



✓ Compucess



✓ Crash Landing



✓ Cyber Surf



✓ Cyber Fun



✓ Cyber Racers



✓ Coaster Wars



✓ Confidential Mission



✓ Conflict Zone



✓ Crazy Taxi



✓ Daizy Beez



✓ D2



✓ Daytona USA



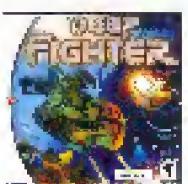
✓ Daytona USA



✓ Dino Crisis



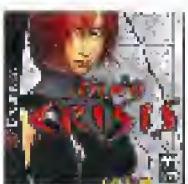
✓ Donkey Konga



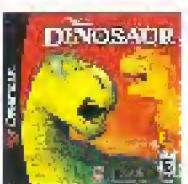
✓ Double Fighter



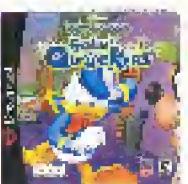
✓ Domination: Total War



✓ Dune Cross



✓ Dino-Saur



✓ Dino-Duck: Giga Quack

Dreamcast Photo Checklist



✓ Dark Ages:
War for the Wym



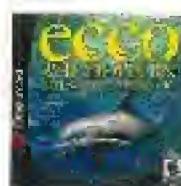
✓ Double Dragon Returns



✓ Ducati World Racing:
MotoGP



✓ Ecco: The Distant Prophecy



✓ Ecco the Dolphin:
Defender of the Future



✓ ECW Anarchy Rules



✓ ECW Hardcore
Revolution



✓ EGG



✓ ESPN International Track
and Field



✓ ESPN NBA 2Night



✓ Evolution:
Survival of the Fittest



✓ Evolution:
The World's
Scariest Events



✓ Evolution 2:
Fear of the Future



✓ Expendables



✓ F1 World Grand Prix



✓ F1 2001 Challenge:
Precision Racing



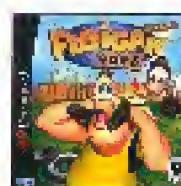
✓ Fala: Fury of the
Phoenix



✓ Fighting Force 2



✓ Flappy Black



✓ Flapjack Brothers



✓ Frogger 2:
Swampy's
Revenge



✓ Fur Fighters



✓ Gauntlet: Legends



✓ Judge Dredd



✓ King of the Hill 2



✓ Grand Theft Auto 2



✓ Grindball



✓ The Grinch



✓ Gundit 2



✓ Gundam:
Side Story 2079



✓ Gekko: Metal Gear Solid



✓ Mission: Impossible 2



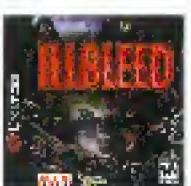
✓ The House of the Dead 2



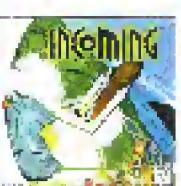
✓ Casino



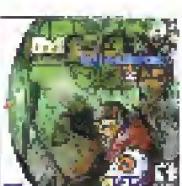
✓ Thunder Thunder



✓ Icetec



✓ In the Name of
the King



✓ Infected:
Bio-Spectrum
Ecodrome



✓ Jet Set Radio



✓ Jeremy McGrath:
Supercross 2001



✓ Kung Fu Panda



✓ Kung Fu Panda:
Legendary Adventures

Dreamcast Photo Checklist



L. Virtua Fighter 2



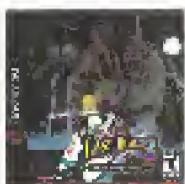
L. The King of Fighters Dream Match



L. The King of Fighters Evolution



L. KISS Psycho Circus: The Nighttime Child



L. The Last Stage II: Heat of the Showdown



L. Journey To The Stone Race



L. Rapdance Racing



L. Disney's Toy Story: Pixar Playhouse



L. Maken X



L. Tekken 3



L. Marvel vs. Capcom



L. Marvel vs. Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes



L. Wall Ballz Pro EMX



L. Max Steel



L. Maximum Pool



L. M.U.G.I.E.N.



L. Tekken Tag Tournament



L. Mickey Greatest Arcade Hits Volume 1



L. Mickey Greatest Arcade Hits Volume 2



L. Mickeyland Grand Park



L. Virtual Reality T-Bird



L. NBA Jam



L. Ms. Pac-Man Maze Madness



L. MTV Sports: Superbowl featuring Andy McDonald



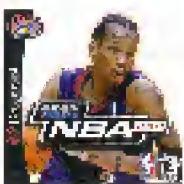
L. Virtua Museum



L. NBA 2K



L. NBA 2K1



L. NBA 2K2



L. NBA Hoops



L. NBA Showdown: NBA on NBC



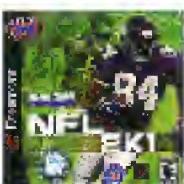
L. NCAA College Football 99: The Official Rose Bowl



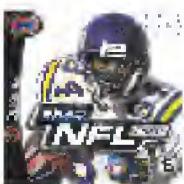
L. The Real Thing: One on One Billiards



L. NFL 2K



L. NFL 2K1



L. NFL 2K2



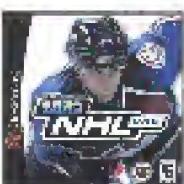
L. NHL 2K00



L. NHL Quikwick Club 2001



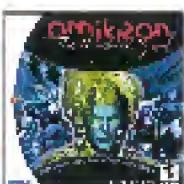
L. NHL 98



L. NHL 99



L. Virtua Fighter 3: Final Showdown



L. Virtua Fighter 3: Final Showdown



L. Virtua Fighter 3: Final Showdown

Dreamcast Photo Checklist



- OutRun



- Pan Pan Island



- Phantasy Star Online Vol. 2



- Phantasy Star Online Vol. 2



- Plasma Sword



- POD Speedzone



- Power Zone



- Power Stone 2



- Princess of Persia: Sands of Time



- Project Justice



- Project Police 2010



- Q*Bert



- Quetzal



- Rayman 1



- Rayman 2: The Green Seasons



- Razor Freestyle Scooter



- Ready 2 Rumble Boxing



- Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2



- Reeds vs. Lekkes War



- Red Dog: Survivor



- Reel Fishing Wild



- Resident Evil 1



- Resident Evil 3: Nemesis



- Resident Evil: Code - Veronica



- Revo



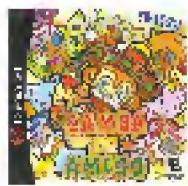
- Rip N Ride Snowboardin'



- Riptide



- Rogue Spear



- Romeo Jo Amigo



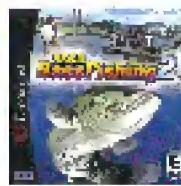
- San Francisco 4ever 2010



- Seaman



- Segway Racing



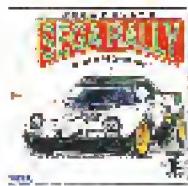
- Sega Bass Fishing 2



- Sega GT



- Sega Marine Fishing



- Sega Rally Championship



- Sega Smash Pack



- Seven's Cross Evolution



- Shadow Man



- Silent Scope



- Skies of Arcadia

Dreamcast Photo Checklist



✓ Star Wars Episode I: Racer



✓ Rayman



✓ Star Wars Episode I: Racer



✓ Sonic Adventure



✓ Sonic Adventure 2



✓ Sonic Shuffle



✓ Star Fox 64



✓ Soul Fighter



✓ South Park: Cartman's World Tour



✓ South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut



✓ Space Channel 5



✓ Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace



✓ Spec Ops II: Dragon Strike



✓ Speed Demons



✓ Speed Racer: On the Racing



✓ Spider-Man



✓ Speed: The Video Game



✓ Sports.com



✓ Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace



✓ Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace



✓ Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace



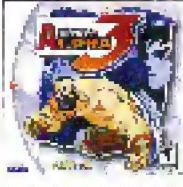
✓ Star Wars: Episode One - Racer



✓ Street Fighter III



✓ Street Fighter III: Double Impact



✓ Street Fighter Alpha 3



✓ Strike Pro 2000



✓ Star Wars: Episode One - Racer



✓ Super Mario 64



✓ Super Monaco GP



✓ Surf Rocket Racers



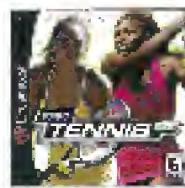
✓ Suzuki GSX-R 750



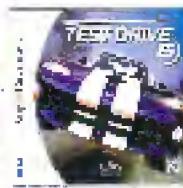
✓ Sydney 2000 Olympic Games



✓ Tee Off



✓ Tennis 2K2



✓ Test Drive 3



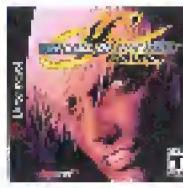
✓ Test Drive 4: The Game



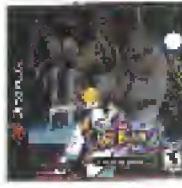
✓ Test Drive 5: World Circuit



✓ The King of Fighters



✓ The King of Fighters



✓ The King of Fighters

Dreamcast Photo Checklist



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Proto Patrol



PROPELLER ARENA HISTORY

by Michael Thomasson of
Good Deal Games

Unreleased, but completed, the flight of Propeller Arena: Aviation Battle Championship was sadly cancelled before it could ever leave the runway...

In the year 2045, World War II era prop planes were retrofitted to compete in aerial combat for glory and valuable prizes. Propeller Arena was not a flight simulator, but a series of dog fighting death matches. Often referred to as "Quake in the skies" the game played like a quick multi-player first person shooter. Propeller Arena was developed by Sega's own AM2 team, famed designers of the popular flight game Afterburner, and other hits such as Out Run, Shenmue and Virtua Fighter. The online Sega Net title pieced together a rocking soundtrack complete with microphone enabled voice chat, a relatively

new feature at the time used previously in Alien Front Online, and premiering console online chat and online team co-op play before the similar Crimson Skies title for the X-Box Live service years later.

Propeller Arena should have climbed into the glorious skies like the planes in the game, but instead took a dive due to a tragic course of events. Scheduled to be released in September, the title was shot down after the September 11th attacks destroyed the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center. There were similarities found among the game and the cowardly terrorist actions.

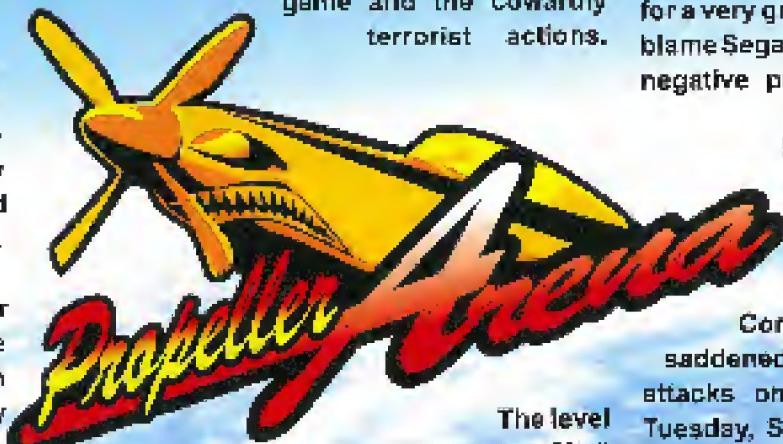


packaging box art depicted airplanes flying near high-rise buildings.

Imagine Sega's fears if they released such a game in the wake of 9/11. Worries that players could, in essence, recreate the tragic events of that day, including dialogue through the online voice-chat, made for a very grim scenario. One cannot blame Sega for wanting to avoid such negative press in the public eye.

Sega's official press statement announcing the delay, which turned out to be permanent, stated: "Sega

Corporation was greatly saddened to learn of the terrorist attacks on the United States on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Our deepest condolences go out to the families and friends of those injured or who lost their lives in the horrific events. At this time, we have decided to postpone shipment of Propeller Arena for the Dreamcast. Although the game content does not deal with terrorism in any way, it is possible for a determined individual to deliberately play the game in a manner that generates images similar to those we have seen on the news. We want to avoid causing any additional grief to those involved in this week's tragedy and feel this is an appropriate action."



The level "Tower City" was modelled after Manhattan, and replicas of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers were prominent in the city's skyline. In the Propeller Arena "Airport" level, the player could even hijack airplanes. Even the

g a m e



Continued text

Continued from page 12, OverClocked ReMix

levels Capcom. Very fast, we basically wrapped it up in mid-April.

dpatrick: We don't really look back since we've all done this before... I we needed to, we could probably put logic in it pretty quick actually. But in terms of time spent, the basic answer is "a lot." Speaking for myself, writing the music was actually the easy part; prioritizing everything and making sure no one was slacking with deadlines, and ensuring that Capcom's feedback was both conveyed and acted upon... that was the hard part.

What has the feedback been like so far, both from the beta testing and the public beta albums?

Larry OJ Blood on the Asobi: I had a quick reaction when it was released. I felt some of the arrangements from Blood were too flat and raw in my opinion. And I think Capcom felt the same way, because anything I wouldn't have used would have been in the final game. In the year, the album went over well, even though it's come music closer. King of Fighters X emerged as much more, say, *Final Fantasy VI*. Honestly, the lack of humor is for a reason, but Street Fighter X is surprising me given how iconic the SF2 soundtrack is.

As for H.O.R. beta feedback, I consider that for us, and the feedback for the beta and demo footage has been great. I can't wait to follow players to see if the full experience matches like anything that's released out there. The mix for millions of people, across different genres, just isn't something expected. But the major majority of comments have been excellent, with lots of love using it as either soundtracks or release. It's coming. Capcom's VP of Strategic Planning & Business Development, Christian Sprenger, called the soundtrack "impeccable," which didn't make him a better component for our guys. Who knows, perhaps Capcom will officially release it. I'd certainly love to and it'd be in our best interest, but a digital release would also be great since I'd expect it to be used well in the VR/OC Remix.

If there was one more game DCR could produce the music for, what would it be?

Larry OJ Blood: Talking about remakes of classic games, I'd love to see what we could do for *Castlevania*. The original 2D games got plenty of rock and orchestral versions, but few soundtracks. It's an interesting game to do. I think OC Remi is equipped with the talent to tackle any kind of game. We've got hundreds of great SNK works who collectively work in nearly every genre and would all turn out some masterpiece. I'm in the mood for a quirky game that anyone can quickly pick up like *Katamari Damacy* or *LocoRoco*, both of which had very unique soundtracks. I'd also still love to help broaden people's perspectives on game music, something that the art of OC Remixes can always do. They create new Horizons. I think we could bring that same kind of fresh take to new titles, so I'm thinking toward helping those organize an original soundtrack for the game.

dpatrick: I remember *Star Strike* and *Star Siege* machine and series, a single-player classic RPG follow-up, as I grew up until the *Star Strike* series came along the music. If we wanted things to just remix the original material, I think I would do an *SNK3D* remake of the first three *Ninja Gaiden* installments in a style similar to *Chocobo's Dungeon* Remixed remake, and I think OC Remi would do just fine for the soundtrack.

Continued from page 20, The King of Fighters XII

The King of Fighters NeoGeo - The King of Fighters NeoGeo is essentially an experiment in technology. Instead of going global with the massive Amiga-based hardware, SNK performed a test run. Myself being one, right off the bat you'd know I've already missed something funny is going on, because it looks like the Amiga release is the franchise, yet that is reserved for the following Japanese Axis. However, there's more. NeoGeo is traditional, to a certain degree at the new that was added in the beginning of 2003, which gives it a decidedly "been there, done that" feel.

The King of Fighters XI - With anime representation integrated well, SNK Playmore got serious and produced their real King of Fighters on the Amiga-based hardware. Uniting the yearly installments to allow for more to last over several hours. The King of Fighters XI brought back the tag team fighting of 2003 and its new additions to the cast, but they stayed in the neutral style to the point that the characters look like rejects from a Japanese fashion magazine. The Amiga-based hardware was already utilized well when SNK Playmore began, so it did lend a higher resolution to the artwork. Unfortunately, it's also in a way ruined apparently by the backgrounds are largely holes, the recycled sprites, and the lack of pieces and SNK Playmore cut a few corners here and there, to the embarrassing bad-super-mashup look.

The Handheld Installments

The King of Fighters '96 (Game Boy) - Oddly enough SNK never allowed Taito to produce a version of any King of Fighters for the mainstream 16 bit systems, despite that they were happy to hand over their other major franchises, but they did consent to the Game Boy editions. And they just as bad as the original SNK editions. And they're just as bad as the original SNK editions. While they retained the basic concept and the individual core graphics remain, the personality of the characters, the A.I., is horribly unbalanced, stodgy, is passable, and the sound is abysmal. Additionally, though, thanks to Game Boy conditions, there are two extra hits in being added, and The King of Fighters '96 is one of the more playable examples, assuming you can ignore that the graphics are entirely different from its arcade counterpart.

NeoGeo: The King of Fighters '96 (Game Boy Advance) - Like, one to one take on '96, the second Game Boy game never left Japan, which is a shame to say, as it's among the few to be its predecessor. At the very least, it "comes" slightly better. A... the same. Retitled Super Game Boy version and tries to emulate its VGA counterpart with Game Boy, and most of the original music and backgrounds.

King of Fighters R (Neo Geo Pocket Color) - While this one remained in house with SNK worked later to the core and continued the prequel status of the series they were born from KOF '96 based on '97. Naturally, the result is an infinitely more enjoyable game, with lovely balanced movement, far superior controls and absolutely idiotic inputs with high, unnecessary lag. The only downside? It never had a real release in America, but instead came under the European version of the SNK USA.

King of Fighters R-2 (Neo Geo Pocket Color) - King of Fighters R-2 offers more of the same, except with two less characters – it was available at retail in the U.S. and not in color. Predictably, it's based on The King of Fighters '98 and links up to the theatrical release of said game.

The King of Fighters Battle of Paradise (Neo Geo Pocket Color) - One would assume that the third Neo Geo Pocket KOF would be another cutsey fighter, this time focusing on SP mode, but the fight cult players in Japan were bummed out when they got a grimly linear game instead. Lasting as little as a tool to unlock content in the Dissident mod of '98. Battle of Paradise is a city-plop. The KOF-themed min-games are fun, but Main Party does not.

The King of Fighters EX: Neo Blood (Game Boy Advance) - The Game Boy Advance received the less-hated version of '96, but you may as well pretend Neo Blood doesn't exist. Developed by Arcsys, Neo Blood is a brutal conversion of impressive, if often stale, cut-throat action. Choppy slow, broken game play, Earthshaking AI, foul, inhuman one and scenes that should be there and scratchy, garbled, horrendous snippets of integral music – one needs a thesaurus to begin describing Neo Blood.

The King of Fighters EX2: Heating Road (PlayStation 2) - If you didn't head for the hills after Neo Blood, it's about time a marginally better experience developed by Sunsoft and based on 2003's Heating Road is enough. The game, except with more new characters, fighter gameplay and less in-game cutscenes, pretty much matches up to down as The King of Fighters Battle of Paradise.

The Maximum Impact Series

KOF Maximum Impact (PlayStation 2 / Xbox) - SNK's old slogan "The Future Is Now!" was long gone by the year 2000, replaced with the reputation of clinging on to outdated tech crap for dear life. Few knew that SNK did make a valiant effort to stay current with their Hyper Neo Geo 64 console series, designed with 3D games in mind. However, it received such lukewarm reception that very few human beings want to touch that god-awful game. But, oopsie, Neo created Maximum Impact, a 3D King of Fighters spin-off series, bypassing other modern fighters. Maximum Impact is unique in that it looks and feels nothing like any game of its polygonal world.

The King of Fighters 2000 (PlayStation 2) - In chronological order with the first entry series, The King of Fighters 2000 is giving gamers an unusual twist to Square's attempt to break away from the simple battle that is Maximum Impact. 2000 is visually the same as the original, in pixelated effort to try to please the die-hard SNK fans. With hyper-exaggerated health bars, unlockable characters from various SNK franchises and loads of unique costumes from the mixed palette of original 2000, styled to the brim with fan service.

The Oddities

Outs King of Fighters (Neo Geo - Japan only) - Because every arcade needed at least one game that was a complete waste of money. Outs King of Fighters was born. As a hedge against early KOF, the using SNK's Brainstorm, however the Imagine makes that worse, the game has you have around 8 game bases, going unasked by SNK taught with random trivia questions.

The King of Fighters Kyo (PlayStation - Japan only) - Have you ever considered playing the King of Fighters with Konami's Tekken/Mortal Kombat 2 Year, no, neither, consider the thought it was a great idea – now even, as it started as a fangame. Taking place between '96 and '97, Kyo is a story-based simulation of Kyo's life. The sporadic fight play out in a time-based fashion which will re-clock the game as you'd imagine.

Reviews

Clayfighter TE

Company: Interplay

Platform: Super Nintendo • May 1994

When Street Fighter II reigned supreme, many companies not only followed in Capcom's footsteps of releasing fighting games, but also rehashing the titles with full-price "updates" to the software. When Interplay released Clayfighter on the SNES and Genesis, it got immediate attention due to its fully digitized clay models and bizarre concepts but it failed to hold long-term interest thanks to a few sloppy mechanics, recycled themes and balance issues. A possible answer for these issues came in the form of a Super Nintendo-only cart, which promised a number of fixes and new game modes. While Tournament Edition did patch up a few leaks, it failed to add anything to make this ship worth sailing.



Clayfighter had the workings of a champ, but its cheap game play and horrible animation really cheapen the title. Neither are fixed in Tournament Edition and while some of the patches such as reducing The Blob's deadly sawblade to one hit are understandable, others such as nerfing Bonkers' mid-air block move are just baffling and simple infinite combos still remain in the game. The update adds a few new backgrounds to break up the monotony and a tournament feature for when more than two people want to go at it, but these standard features just aren't worth the price of admission. TE just ends up being a Clayfighter 1.5 with few new things to do instead of giving players more replayability, animation or characters – in fact, by removing the glitch to play as N. Boss, Interplay technically reduced the roster in TE.

That's not to say that absolutely no fun can be had from the title as it definitely quite a curious fighter. When not in motion, the characters and backgrounds look fantastic and many great sound and voice clips really bring the title's zany humor to life. The surface of Clayfighter is attractive enough to lure players to the dinner table but when they get to the game play, they are offered a cough drop instead of a steak. The choppy game play, shallow roster, ultra-cheap AI and lack of replayability make Clayfighter TE not enough for player to sink their teeth into and after one playthrough, chances are you'll be ready to plug a better fighter into the system.

Regardless, in the massive sea of Super Nintendo fighters, Clayfighter Tournament Edition's obscurity is enough to keep it as one of the very few fighters to retain at least a little value. While you can pick the title up on the cheap, at times the cart can close in on the \$20 mark, especially on complete copies.



Pump It Up: Exceed

Company: Mastiff

Platform: Xbox • Aug. 29, 2005

Nipping on the coattails of the surging dancing/rhythm game trends, Mastiff published Andamiro's Pump It Up franchise for the first time on home consoles. While the game was originally released on U.S. shores through a PC port of the Korean arcade dance hit about ten years ago, the best-selling Dance Dance Revolution series by Konami got yet another competitor on the Xbox and PlayStation 2 in Pump It Up: Exceed.



While the different format of dancing should give the casual player another healthy alternative, long-time players will notice the same game they played nearly five years ago. The most notable difference Pump It Up pushes in front of players is its obvious change in the dance pad layout. Instead of the standard DDR 90-degree arrow layout (left, up, down, right), Andamiro's dance layout is the complete reverse as every space that used to be metal on the DDR dance pad is now given a button.

With the arrows surrounding you diagonally, dance motions become much more natural and your freedom of motion increases greatly, making Pump It Up more of a dancing game than its competition. With that in mind, Andamiro enlisted professional dancers to assist in choreographing the step charts for the songs in the game. Pump It Up integrated hold arrows, modifications and hi-res background videos before DDR, but because it is making its way into the American market way too late into the trend, it ends up looking much more unoriginal and bland than it should.

Furthermore, while the game features around 100 dance tracks, aside from a mere handful of licensed U.S. tracks, Pump It Up: Exceed offers little to differentiate it from its original arcade release in 2004. Pump It Up features a score of Korean tracks, which deliver a healthy mix of music genres from R&B to pop to hardcore.

While the pad holds up during the easier songs, once you hit the big-time, the pad tends to crumple up and move about, making it a bit more difficult to clear the really hard songs. The menu navigation can be a little irritating at first with the dance pad and the five-button layout. However, it's nothing a player won't get accustomed to after a few goes at the game.

Exceed came in too late to have a huge impact on the U.S. dancing market but for collectors, it is the only DDR alternative on the system, with a set usually hanging in the \$20-30 area. Pump It Up: Exceed is worth every penny, but don't expect it to turn the world of dancing games upside-down.



Reviews

Name: Samba de Amigo
Company: Sega
Platform: Dreamcast • Oct. 16, 2000

In a time before gamers were slapping down \$200 for Rock Band packages, the Sega Dreamcast saw a decent part of the company's arcade music game title Samba de Amigo. With official maraca controllers running \$80 per player on top of \$10 for the game itself, Samba was the first to rock the peripheral boundaries in U.S. music gaming and, thankfully, years later the title still holds up as a semi-valuable and fun commodity.



While Japan had quite a lineup running for music games on the Sega Dreamcast, Samba just happened to be one of the very few titles ported to the U.S. in the genre, prior to dance games flooding the market just a few years afterward. Presumably, the game's Latin feel is to be credited for the U.S. port and players will definitely feel the theme through song selections such as Livin' La Vida Loca, El Ritmo Tropical or Soul Bossa Nova. Players choose a song and either through special motion-based maraca controllers or the standard controller shake their way through a variety of songs in order to get the highest score possible.

The presentation in Samba is extremely well-done with charming characters and environments and a number of flashy animations and illusions that reflect how a player is performing at any given point in a song. The on-disc songs compliment the maraca mechanic very well and while all of the songs are covers, they all pump well through your speakers and are guaranteed to keep your feet tapping.

Unfortunately, some of the graphics can be distracting, especially with the exclusion of colors producing while players are performing at the best rating. A handful of players may also have trouble calibrating the maraca controllers, especially third-party varieties, and using the Dreamcast controller just isn't as fun. The three different commands - shake, roll and pose - mix up game play and keep it fresh all through the song but current day players may find the song list quite short. Although the list can be extended slightly through downloadable content, to access it, players either have to have a VMU with saved data from nearly a decade ago or use tools to download save files.

Mirror beat aside, not many games on the system rival the party feel two sets of maracas and Samba can provide. Thankfully, players today can experience this at 50-70% of the original price. Full Import sets can be purchased for \$100 and domestic maracas can fetch anywhere between \$30-\$70 on eBay. The game itself doesn't hold extravagant value, but many fans of the system and series will look to the Japanese-only Version 2001, usually included in the aforementioned import sets.

Rating: 3.5



Name: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
Platform: NES
Company: Konami • Year: 1993

Regardless of their quality, Konami had three extremely popular Ninja Turtles games for the NES under its belt and when the Street Fighter craze swept the world, the company had no better license to slap onto a fighter than the heroes in a half shell. While this meant the Super Nintendo and the Sega Genesis received yet another obligatory fighter in its pile, surprisingly, NES owners were treated to one of the very few one-on-one titles ever officially released for the system.



The menus are very clean and the up-close character portraits are very detailed, but in-game, the characters resemble the small models seen in previous NES entries, making the large character Hothead seem much more detailed than the others. Regardless of detail, however the bigger distraction is the massive flickering occurs during every second of the match. While players learn to ignore it, it is by far the biggest nuisance of the entire game. If the character models and animation could have measured up to the rest of the game, Tournament Fighters would be a perfect graphic concoction. Thankfully, excellent music and voice effects are present to flesh out an overall superb presentation.

Although the control is mapped to only two buttons, the fighters have a lot of versatility during matches, with a number of punches, kicks, running attacks, special moves, throws and even a super projectile that can be executed after picking up an item. While the turtles mostly play the same, all of the characters differ slightly in some way so players should be able to find a favorite among the seven playable fighters. The real joy of playing the game is in multi-player since the CPU fights pathetically unless pushed up to the hard difficulty. With a total of four players alternating the controllers, the game's tournament mode alone can produce hours of intense play and rounds out the surprisingly robust option set the game offers.

Overall, when it comes to the NES, Tournament Fighters may surprise what gamers expect from an 8-bit fighter. While the single-player mode lacks depth and flicker runs rampant, the title will certainly entertain those who can look past the flaws. Collectors should take note of the title for a number of reasons: Releasing in 1993, it was Konami's first NES offering in the U.S.; Tournament is the final game series based on the original 1987 animation; it is the only game in the TMNT universe where the turtles do not use their trademark weapons; complete copies feature the NES variant cover of Leonardo fighting Hothead. As such, values on the cart are climbing insanely fast, with a recent eBay auction netting nearly \$140 for the complete package.

Rating: 4.5



Veggie



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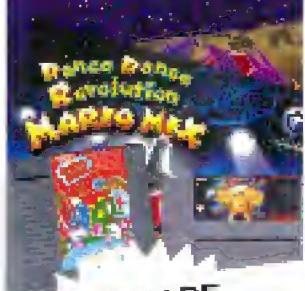
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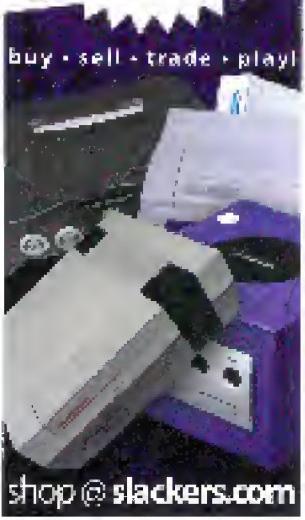


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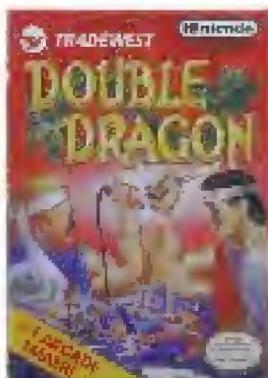
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90



89



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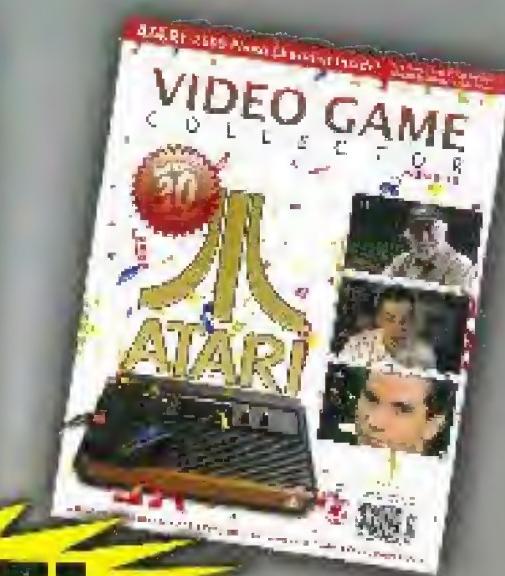
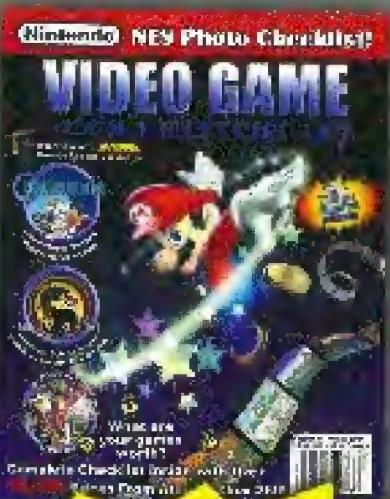
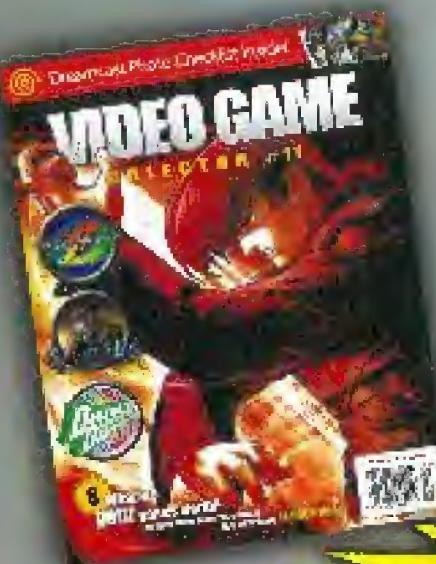
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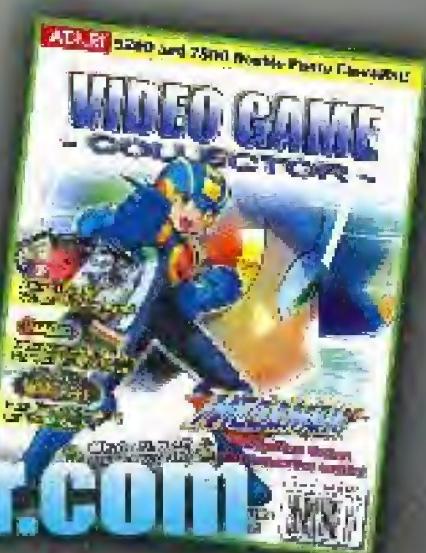
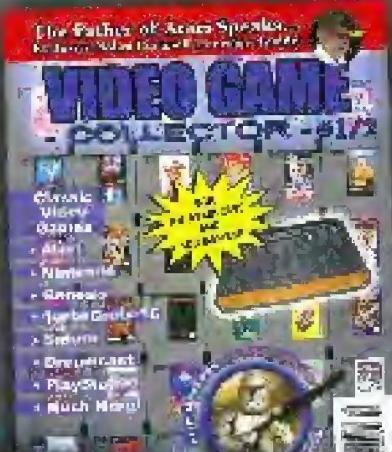
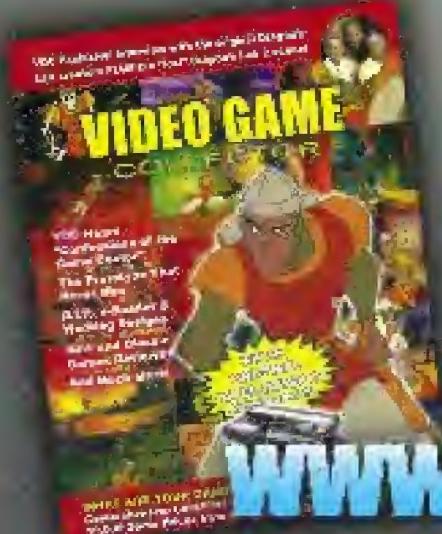
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